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## Weaving the Statesman: the Unity of Plato's Politicus

Ryan Middleton

*The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor

Dr. John Thorp

*The University of Western Ontario*

Graduate Program in Philosophy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of  
Philosophy

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WEAVING THE STATESMAN: THE UNITY OF PLATO'S *POLITICUS*

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

RYAN MIDDLETON

Graduate Program in Philosophy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

Plato's *Statesman* comprises three parts: method, myth, and politics. Scholars tend to pivot around any one of these, but seldom address how they fit together. My thesis argues for unity to the dialogue. The method, myth, and politics of the *Statesman* are connected by a common theme: the correct management of the parts of a whole. Each section in the dialogue concerns the appropriate management of the parts of something. The myth describes a time during which the cosmos was steered by a divine helmsman. By superintending the whole, the helmsman ensured that the parts were correctly organized. The method in the *Statesman* divides general kinds into their parts. The interlocutors discuss rules for ensuring that the divisions are made correctly, and in this way, the method of division concerns the ability to accurately arrange the parts of a whole. In breaking an important rule concerning the method of division, however, the interlocutors are alluding to the political theory discussed at the end of the dialogue where an argument is made that a true statesman is not bound by the law. Furthermore, genuine statesmanship involves the ability to correctly weave together the disparate elements of a city. In the absence of statesmen, cities can only imitate the rule of statesmanship, much as the cosmos imitates the motion of the divine helmsman in the myth when it is left to its own devices. Thus, each part of the dialogue intersects with the others. And what unifies each of these parts is just that each them concerns the ability to unify disparate parts.

## Keywords

Plato's *Statesman*, Statesmanship, Division, Division trees, Constitutionalism, Sovereignty, Greek myth, Cronus, Political theory.

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## Chapter 1

### 1 Introduction

In the summer of 1992, the third Symposium Platonicum convened to discuss Plato's dialogue, the *Statesman*.<sup>1</sup> At that time, the *Statesman* had received relatively little scholarly attention. But with the conference, interest in the dialogue was momentarily revived. It even resulted in a new translation and commentary by Christopher Rowe.<sup>2</sup> The revival was short-lived, however, and discussion has since tapered. I believe that some of the dialogue's difficulties were left unresolved, even untouched. Among those difficulties is that the *Statesman* appears to be topically disconnected. It is at once a discussion of epistemic methodology and a political commentary, inquiring into leadership. And in the middle we find a puzzling myth that tells of the motions of the cosmos. Read by scholars, the dialogue lacks unity—at least on the surface.

#### 1.1 The Disunity of the *Statesman*

This thesis argues that there is a unifying theme—a unity—in the three parts in Plato's *Statesman*. By “unity” I mean the functional unity of the respective parts of the dialogue—the way these seemingly unrelated parts work together in the text. Scholarship on the *Statesman* misses the connection between the dialogue's diverse parts and typically investigates one or other of them as independent entities.

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<sup>1</sup> The multi-lingual papers presented there were published in Rowe, *Reading the Statesman*.

<sup>2</sup> Rowe, *Plato: Statesman*.

First, the dialogue pertains to Plato's political theory and especially to the relationship between his (so-called) middle-period political theory and the political theory we find in the *Laws* (generally thought to be Plato's final work). Second, a lengthy cosmic myth appearing near the beginning places the *Statesman* among the works relevant for Plato's cosmology. More ink has been spilled over this part than any other, mostly due to the myth's influence on the Neoplatonists. Third, the dialogue is read by scholars interested in Plato's epistemology and metaphysics. It abounds with methodological digressions on the "division" of "forms" and is thought to exhibit Plato's later dialectical method.

Thus, three aspects of the dialogue—the politics, myth, and method—are considered separately in the literature. However, almost nothing has been written about what connects these three features. This thesis explores how we might weave these three facets of the *Statesman* together.

## 1.2 Initial Hypothesis

My contention is that what brings the *Statesman* together—what connects the myth to the method to the politics—is precisely the theme of managing the parts of a whole. The power to distinguish and divide reality is the capacity to divide general kinds into their subkinds in order to arrive at an account (*logos*) of the thing under investigation. Any inquiry depends for its success on this capacity, at least according to the interlocutors in the *Statesman*. The method employed (and discussed) in the dialogue is a demonstration of the ability to correctly distinguish parts and fit them together.

The accurate discernment and management of the parts of a whole is also a central theme in the myth. The cosmic myth describes two ages: a legendary golden age of the



past during which humanity enjoyed divine governance; and our present degenerate (or fallen) age in which we must direct our own political affairs. The confusion in the myth serves to illustrate that it is common to mistake our own age for some kind of golden age. This would not have been difficult in Athens during Plato's time—a time of abundant wealth and progress (despite debilitating wars and rampant slavery). It might be added that a similar chauvinism is common among North Americans today. The lesson of the myth in the *Statesman* is that the present age is wrongly regarded as a prior one. To appropriately understand the nature of politics, these two ages must be correctly identified and distinguished.

Finally, the power to discriminate and manage the parts of a whole is, in the *Statesman*, the essence of political power itself. The dialogue ultimately reveals the statesman as someone who can weave into a harmonious political fabric a group otherwise divided against itself. Sovereignty resides in the capacity to distinguish and direct the divisions in a group. Rule by statesmen is the only true constitution we can have in this fallen age. And rule *by* statesmen is the rule *of* statesmanship, the rule of a particular kind of knowledge. The political message of the dialogue, we might say, is that—contrary to popular opinion<sup>3</sup>—justice resides not in the rule of law or in the general will of the people, but rather in the rule of a particular kind of knowledge. The statesman, as lawgiver, might express this knowledge through law, but law in the absence of the statesman is a mere imitation of it. As I argue, the statesman's expertise lies precisely in the capacity to accurately discern and properly manage the divided elements of the state.

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<sup>3</sup> As popular in fourth-century Athens as it is today. See Harris, *DRLCA*, 48 (and *passim*).

The three separate subjects investigated in the *Statesman* thus have a common theme: each of them is about the correct management of the parts of something. What unifies the three disparate parts of the *Statesman* is that all three are attempts to unify disparate parts.

### 1.3 Synopsis of the Inquiry into Statesmanship

Plato's *Politikos* is aptly translated “the *Statesman*.”<sup>4</sup> In English, the term “statesman” is reserved for someone accomplished in matters of the state—someone with a particular kind of knowledge or expertise in directing political affairs. The term is not synonymous with “politician.” A politician is anyone who happens to be influential in politics. And “politician” is often a derogatory term. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes this as the original sense in the first entry: “A politic person; chiefly in a sinister sense, a shrewd schemer; a crafty plotter or intriguer.” English usage is sensitive to the distinction between “politician” and “statesman” and it is perhaps for a similar reason that Plato uses “*ho politikos*.”

In the *Statesman*, politicians are described as charlatans masquerading as statesmen (*Pol.* 291c). Inquiry into statesmanship is thus a tricky endeavor. But a successful inquiry, we are told, will produce an account of statesmanship that clearly distinguishes true statesmen from those merely pretending to be such. As the dialogue unfolds we find that just as pertinent a topic is the very procedure by which any such account can be

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<sup>4</sup> The word *politikos* is an adjective used substantively. There is no Greek word for “politician” other than *rhetor* (literally, an orator).

achieved in the first place. The *Statesman* is as much about methodology as it is about politics.

The dialogue opens with Socrates expressing his gratitude to Theodorus for introducing him to both Theaetetus and the nameless Stranger from Elea (hereafter “the Stranger”). These introductions were made in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, respectively. The *Statesman* is presented as the conclusion of a two-day colloquium that spans all three dialogues.

In the *Sophist*, the Stranger led the inquiry into sophistry. Socrates and the others present listened as the Stranger questioned one of Theodorus’ young pupils. The *Statesman* mirrors this structure with the Stranger this time investigating the art of statesmanship. Socrates again remains silent, except for a few brief remarks at the beginning. In the *Statesman*, the Stranger’s interlocutor is a young pupil who shares Socrates’ name. This “Young Socrates” is eager to assist the Stranger in the hunt for what is ultimately a kind of elaborate definition of statesmanship—of what statesmanship is. To find this, they begin by deciding that statesmanship is a kind of knowledge. They further agree that this kind of knowledge is theoretical (*gnostikos*) rather than practical. Theoretical knowledge itself comes in two kinds. One kind judges while the other commands. The Stranger asks Young Socrates under which kind statesmanship should fall, and the latter correctly places it under the kind that commands.

And so the discussion continues. A general kind divides into two subkinds (see Appendix A). Each subkind is a collection of arts, but only one of these contains the art of statesmanship. That kind is preserved for further division. The goal is to arrive at a

subkind of knowledge that includes the art of statesmanship but excludes all other forms of knowledge. That goal proves more difficult as they proceed.

Part of the problem is the number of cooperative arts involved in achieving the same general end as that of statesmanship. A series of divisions leads the two characters to conclude that statesmanship is the kind of knowledge that concerns the care of humans. But several arts can claim that. Statesmanship, it remains to be shown, is the art *proper* to human caretaking.

To establish this, the Stranger divides human caretaking into its contributory and direct causes (287bff). Nourishment, for example, is important to the care of humans, but it does not itself provide that care. Thus, the arts of farming and cooking fall among the contributory causes. The direct causes are the arts belonging to servants and to leaders. The latter include the arts of generalship, rhetoric, and judgeship. But because each of those, it is explained, acts as subordinate to the art of statesmanship, the art of human caretaking (properly) belongs to the art of the statesman.

## 1.4 Digressions

The section above summarized the *Statesman* as it might be read if the digressions were absent. Much of the philosophical significance of the dialogue, however, is found in these numerous digressions. When Young Socrates first attempts his own division, he makes a mistake that prompts the Stranger to digress at length about methodology. That digression is immediately followed by the so-called Myth of Cronus. Later, when the investigation stalls and an example is needed, the Stranger digresses to discuss the nature of example itself. The example finally provided is the art of weaving, but even this

example drags on until it is replaced by yet another digression on excess and deficiency (with the Stranger fully aware that these digressions themselves feel excessive).

In fact, the balance of Plato's political theory in the *Statesman* is found in one long digression near the end. There, the true and corrupt forms of government are distinguished and compared and we are treated to a rich discussion of sovereignty and the rule of law. Only then does the investigation resume. The final pages of the dialogue imagine a statesman whose duties include superintending the curricula of the youth and the eugenic project of weaving together disparate characters through marriage.

## 1.5 Division and the Statesman

The account of statesmanship that the Stranger and Young Socrates develop is an example of Plato's so-called method of division. It is often suggested that Plato's early dialogues highlight the Socratic method (the *elenchus*); the middle dialogues emphasize the method of hypothesis; and the later dialogues employ the method of division.<sup>5</sup> The suggestion is not without controversy, and there are exceptions and overlap. For example, division (as a method) is first described in the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue now believed to be from Plato's middle period. Moreover, the process of dividing itself is not well-understood.

There are important metaphysical questions about division in the scholarship. The most basic of these asks what sort of thing is being divided. What does the method of division operate on? The answer to that usually depends on whether we adopt a

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<sup>5</sup> This view is defended by Benson, in both "Collection and Division" and "Plato's Method."

revisionist approach to Plato's theory of forms. We might read the *Parmenides* as a refutation of the forms after Plato's realization that the theory cannot be maintained.<sup>6</sup> On this reading, division is operating on something other than forms—perhaps on classes of particulars.<sup>7</sup> But there are reasons to be hesitant. In fact, most scholars in this area think division is operating on the forms.<sup>8</sup>

Chapter 2 discusses some of the mechanics to the method of division: how the method works and what it produces. Scholarship on this question is motivated by those interested in Plato's epistemology. This is because the method of division appears to be a method for knowledge acquisition.<sup>9</sup> Arguably, the interlocutors are generating an account of statesmanship, and on this view, Young Socrates and the Stranger are seeking an account of what *defines* statesmanship.

Of particular interest is that the Stranger insists that all divisions proceed dichotomously. The Stranger encourages Young Socrates to divide dichotomously and to make the cuts into the middle of things (*Pol.* 262ab). Making divisions in the middle will increase the likelihood of encountering kinds. This is perplexing, but it is generally thought to mean that they are cutting in accordance with a division that already exists in the thing itself. So, when Young Socrates mistakenly divides herd animals into men and beasts, he has made a subjective cut (another example the Stranger provides is the

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<sup>6</sup> For this view, see Bostock's introduction in his translation of the *Theatetus*.

<sup>7</sup> For the argument that division operates on classes of particulars, see Cohen, "Method of Division." However, cf. Sayre, *MMPS*, 209-214.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Moravcsik, "Anatomy."

<sup>9</sup> See Henry, "Sharp Eye," 234-239.

subjective division of humans into Greeks and barbarians). It is deemed safer to make divisions into the middle of things rather than by slicing off one bit.

But why should divisions proceed dichotomously? Why not make three or ten divisions instead of two? This question is addressed in 2.2 based on an interpretation of the method I develop informed by the two ages in the myth. A related issue is that, whereas the Stranger insists on dichotomy, he himself breaks this rule in the account of statesmanship. Midway through the dialogue, the Stranger is troubled by the difficulty of dichotomous division and he and Young Socrates opt to instead proceed “limb by limb” with a non-dichotomous division. Most scholars ignore this fact. In 2.2.3, I argue that the move is made to lessen the burden of the investigation into statesmanship by grouping the class of arts that contend with the art of statesmanship. The philosophical upshot to my reading is that non-dichotomous division is a tool the dialectician can use to limit the field of inquiry. I further argue that an important connection between non-dichotomous division and the political theory in the dialogue has been overlooked in the scholarship. The use of non-dichotomous division is an example of the rule-maker breaking the rules he himself establishes. The Stranger lays down a methodology that prescribes dichotomy. He can break that rule only because the methodological rules of dialectic are merely a rough guide. These rules are a poor substitute (but perhaps the only acceptable substitute) when a true dialectician is absent. Likewise, the rules laid down by the lawgiver cannot bind the lawgiver himself. Laws are a rough guide for human conduct. Alas, they are a poor substitute, but in the absence of a true statesman, they are the *only* tolerable substitute for the prescriptions and care provided by someone with knowledge of statesmanship.

## 1.6 The Myth of Cronus

In Chapter 3, I advance the claim that the purpose of the myth relates to the ability to correctly discriminate parts. The myth, I argue, overtly connects to the method. The myth is introduced by the Stranger as a necessary digression to develop the account which, at that point, the Stranger suspects is incomplete. The account (as it stands before the myth is told) has presented statesmanship as a kind of theoretical science that concerns the production and care of humans in the way a shepherd cares for his flock. Statesmen possess the science (*episteme*) of herding humans. And although Young Socrates is satisfied that, with this, they have completed their investigation, the Stranger observes a problem. No one would dispute with a shepherd his role as sole rearer of his sheep or that he knows best how to handle them. Yet, in the case of humans, there are numerous contenders. A complete account of the statesman, the Stranger notes, must “remove those who crowd round him, pretending to share his herding function with him” (*Pol.* 268c). The account has encountered a roadblock, and to see the way forward the Stranger introduces “an element of play” (*Pol.* 268e), namely the Myth of Cronus.<sup>10</sup>

The Stranger proceeds to narrate a famously confusing myth that tells of an age during which Cronus controlled the revolution of the heavenly bodies.<sup>11</sup> During this, the Age of Cronus, divinities were responsible for all the necessities of human life. These divinities provide for humankind just as cowherds provide for cattle. But this is not the

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<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Plato are taken from Cooper, *Complete Works*.

<sup>11</sup> The myth is thought to be an allusion to Hesiod’s *Works and Days* as well as Empedocles’ cosmic cycles. On this, see El Murr, “Hesiod” and Rowe, “Grey-Haired Babies.”



age we find ourselves in now. In the present age, the Age of Zeus, humans are forced to fend for themselves. The myth is rich in detail, and particularly difficult. I explore some of these difficulties and show that the Stranger is intentionally exploiting Young Socrates' youth in order to expose the latter's misjudgment concerning the happiness of the people under the absolute care of Cronus.

Immediately following the myth, the Stranger reveals two mistakes the myth was intended to illustrate. One mistake was that the account failed to provide for the manner by which the statesman rules. The other mistake, what the Stranger thinks is the greater mistake, was to imagine the statesman as a kind of shepherd. Statesmen do not stand in relation to citizens as herdsmen do to a herd of animals. Statesmen do not rear humans. Instead, they care for them. The mistake was to describe the statesman as a kind of herd-rearer, portraying the statesman as though he were a ruler from a different age. In other words, the mistake was not seeing a distinction that needed to be made.

As I argue, the mistake in both cases was the failure to properly divide by differentiating the manner of rule in the respective age. Divine rule is restricted to the Age of Cronus where politics takes only one form—that of rearing. Rule over humans in the Age of Zeus has two forms. One can rule as a tyrant using coercion. Or, one can rule by offering voluntary care using persuasion. The statesman employs the latter, and the distinction is needed to separate statesmen from tyrants. It is a mistake not to see a distinction where it exists, and dialecticians have the power to recognize such distinctions correctly.

## 1.7 Political Matters

The role of law and the political philosophy outlined in the *Statesman* is central to Chapter 4. Modern audiences (and scholars) have interpreted Plato's statesman as a kind of tyrannical ruler whose decrees are to be followed exactly but who is not himself subject to his own decrees.<sup>12</sup> While it is true that the statesman is not subject to his or any laws (*Pol.* 295c-296a), the reason for this is due to a limitation in law itself. The generality of laws prevents them from being perfectly beneficial in each particular case. Hence, the rule of law is only second-best (*Pol.* 294a) to a situation where the expertise of statesmanship could adjudicate particular cases. Yet, if we pay close attention to the dialogue, we find that the Stranger believes this option is no longer available to us.<sup>13</sup> The only remaining alternative to constitutional corruption is the strict rule of the established laws—the admittedly outdated laws of the past. This, I argue, is the correct interpretation of the digression on constitutional forms (*Pol.* 291d-303b).<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, the *Statesman* on my reading locates sovereignty in the art of statesmanship itself. At *Pol.* 291d, the Stranger offers a list of the various forms of government. It is a list familiar to readers of Aristotle's *Politics*.<sup>15</sup> But then, the Stranger suggests that the true criterion for genuine constitutions is the presence or absence of

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<sup>12</sup> For this view, see Lane, *MPPS*, 146-163. But this reading is not uncommon: see Taylor, *Sophist and Statesman*, 239, and Skemp, *Statesman*, 47.

<sup>13</sup> *Pol.* 297e-303b: statesmanship has been permanently destroyed, as has the (preferred) option of forming a legitimate and encompassing and up-to-date set of laws. Somehow, this entire section is almost universally ignored in the scholarship.

<sup>14</sup> It is, moreover, one that is consistent with the *Laws*. See Saunders, "Plato's Later."

<sup>15</sup> And Aristotle may have read this passage and then forgotten the source: see Aristotle, *Politics*, 1289b and Ober, *Political Dissent*, 324 n. 65. See also Skemp, *Statesman*, 192 n. 1 and 211 n. 1.

statesmanship (*Pol.* 292c). Once again, the Stranger demonstrates the ability to correctly discriminate forms of government. There is only one real and legitimate form of government, the one where the ruler or rulers truly possess statesmanship (*Pol.* 293c).

To establish unity to the *Statesman* in the way I have suggested, Chapter 4 discusses the final remarks concerning the statesman's ability to weave together the disparate characters of citizens. There is evidence, I argue, that the statesman's ability to forge a particular kind of politically compatible character—one that balances the conflicting virtues of courage and moderation—is an ability tied to the dialectical ability to identify and arrange parts. The statesman ensures that the dispositions of the citizens' offspring are of suitable mixture through marriage. We know that the *Republic* takes social cohesion seriously enough for Socrates to declare that the ideal state will inevitably succumb to mistakes made in its eugenics program (*Rep.* VIII, 546ab). And the city of the *Laws* likewise depends on the correct balance of the characters of the citizens (*Laws* IX, 853c).

Whereas marriage is the human bond the statesman uses to weave the political fabric, true opinion (*doxa alethes*) is the divine bond. In the context of the *Statesman* alone, it is not clear how this is supposed to work. We are told that with true opinion, souls that are prone to excess are tamed and that without it they tend toward brutality. We are further told that meeker souls that grasp true opinion can rise to meet their public duties (*Pol.* 309c-e). Hence, a particular kind of educational policy implemented by the statesman will ensure integrity in the individual citizens and cohesion in the city. I argue that to weave a strong social fabric through marriage and education, the statesman must correctly identify the parts and manage them accordingly. Much like the various parts of

expertise divided and arranged by the Stranger in pursuing the account of statesmanship, the statesman must recognize how the various types of expertise must be arranged in the city. Furthermore, by correctly directing the parts of the city, the statesman weaves them together into a harmonious whole. This works in reverse during the Age of Cronus, where the god is able to bring harmony to the various parts in the cosmos by directing the whole. Thus, both the myth and method are crucial to understanding the political theory in the dialogue.

In antiquity and late antiquity, many of the Platonic dialogues acquired subtitles descriptive of their contents. Thus the *Phaedo* was known as *On the Soul*, the *Menexenus* as *The Funeral Oration*, and the *Sophist* as *On Non-being*. I am not aware that the *Statesman* ever acquired such a descriptive subtitle. My suggestion in this thesis is that a good subtitle would be: *On the Weaving-together of Parts*: περὶ μέρων συμπλοκῆς.

## Chapter 2

### 2 Method

There are good reasons to treat Plato's so-called "method of division"<sup>16</sup> as a method developed across several dialogues.<sup>17</sup> Whereas scholarly consensus on anything in the Platonic corpus is rare and so often ephemeral, most recent scholars accept that a method of division is at least a central part of the late dialogues, replacing or complementing the "method of hypothesis" common to the middle dialogues.<sup>18</sup> However, there are also good reasons, as I will argue, for treating the divisions made in the *Statesman* as unique to that dialogue. By doing so, we can bring unity to the apparently disparate parts of that dialogue. The particular divisions highlighted throughout the *Statesman* are pertinent for understanding the dialogue's myth and its political message—two parts philosophically rich in their own right, but ostensibly unrelated to the method.

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<sup>16</sup> Or more commonly, the method of "collection and division." Scholars who think collection plays a pertinent role in the method tend to interpret it as a dual process. The distinction matters little here, as "collection" (συναγωγή) figures more prominently in the *Phaedrus* and *Philebus*. A description of something resembling collection is given at *Pol.* 285b, but the term is entirely absent from the dialogue. This is not to take sides on the debate. Whether a process of collection is assumed for the divisions in *Statesman* is irrelevant to the argument here. Rather, "division" is preferred for reasons of concision. Cf. Gomez-Lobo, "Dialectic," however, who denies that even division is much of a method at all. See below, n. 42.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, this is how the majority of scholars treat the method—as a method of inquiry discussed in the *Phaedrus* and *Philebus* and developed in the *Statesman* and *Sophist*. Two exceptions are worth noting, however: Lane, *MPPS*, is restricted to the *Statesman*, but her focus is with the political implications; and Sayre, *MMPS* comments extensively on method in the *Statesman*, but only by way of connecting it with Plato's mature ontology.

<sup>18</sup> Benson, "Plato's Method" succinctly explains the consensus and the textual evidence on which it rests. Cf., however, his later article, "Collection and Division," where the dating of the *Phaedrus* presents complications.

In this chapter, I will offer an interpretation of the role played by division in the *Statesman* as it relates to the dialogue as a whole. First, the only other dialogue, apart from the *Statesman*, with extensive divisions throughout most of the text is the *Sophist*. Divisions in that dialogue differ from those in the *Statesman*. There are seven accounts of the sophist, for instance, and only a single account of the statesman. In the *Statesman*, moreover, divided parts are arranged hierarchically. The arrangement suits the topic under examination—that is, statesmanship—because the art of statesmanship controls those subordinate arts closely related to it.

Furthermore I will argue that, as a method, we should appreciate the flexibility of division. The Stranger imposes methodological rules that he then goes on break (much like the statesman he seeks) and he explicitly resists technical terms. Crucially, the Stranger abandons his practice of (and explicit rule for) making divisions dichotomously. Non-dichotomous divisions are a puzzle in current scholarship. As I argue at length, non-dichotomous division is a tool that the dialectician can employ to limit the field of inquiry. The argument for this requires a thorough treatment of the weaving example provided midway through the dialogue, an example that sheds light on the practical need for non-dichotomous division in the *Statesman*.

## 2.1 Division in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*

Both the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* proceed in the same fashion. Socrates and Theodorus appear at the beginnings of both dialogues with a brief preamble before turning the discussion over to the Stranger who picks a young student as his interlocutor. The question asked of the Stranger, raised by Socrates (at *Soph.* 217a), is whether the sophist, statesman, and philosopher are three distinct kinds. The Stranger believes that

indeed they are, warning that an account clearly distinguishing the three types will be arduous (*Soph.* 217b). In the *Sophist*, the Stranger chooses Theaetetus as his interlocutor and they investigate sophistry through a series of divisions. The conversation resumes that afternoon in the *Statesman*. Socrates' namesake, the Young Socrates, replaces Theaetetus in that dialogue. But the investigation again advances with divisions.

To begin their investigation into statesmanship, the Stranger and Young Socrates first agree that statesmen possess a kind of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). Knowledge is then divided into two kinds: practical (πρακτική) and theoretical (γνωστική). We are meant to treat these divisions spatially as falling to the left-hand side and the right-hand side—like an upside-down tree (see Appendix A). They agree that statesmanship is a kind of theoretical knowledge.<sup>19</sup> Theoretical knowledge itself is divided into critical theoretical knowledge and directive theoretical knowledge, with statesmanship decidedly a species of the latter. The right-hand side of the division thus contains the science of statesmanship. The left-hand side can be set aside and the right-hand side of the division is further divided.<sup>20</sup>

The discussion continues in this fashion throughout the dialogue. The Stranger proposes a division, and he and Young Socrates decide where the statesman will be found. Along the way, they enter into a number of digressions of different lengths, but the

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<sup>19</sup> This is a bit of a puzzle. To understand statesmanship as a theoretical science, we should think of the way an architect directs the construction of a building. Statesmanship is like architecture insofar as it is a mental effort. This is borne out in the text, when theoretical sciences are divided into critical and directive sciences (*Pol.* 260ab). The latter include knowledge possessed by the master-builder (ἀρχιτέκτων).

<sup>20</sup> That these divisions fall spatially to the right- and left-hand side is an image conjured throughout the two dialogues, but see esp. *Soph.* 264e for the general rule about disregarding what falls to the left.

dialogue as a whole can be understood as one long series of divisions culminating in a single account of statesmanship.

The *Sophist* differs in this regard insofar as there are multiple division trees, each one producing a different account of sophistry. The sophist is first defined as a kind of hunter whose prey is wealthy and prominent young men. The hunter-sophist baits his prey with virtue. But the sophist is also understood as a kind of salesman or retailer whose product is virtue. Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger discuss six different accounts of sophistry before settling on a final series of divisions depicting the sophist as a kind of imitator who uses words to create the illusion of truth concerning important subjects.

It is left mostly to the reader to decide how these seven accounts in the *Sophist* are related. However, there are textual reasons for thinking that having several definitions of the sophist, and only a single account of the statesman, has nothing to do with the application of the method and everything to do with the respective natures of sophistry and statesmanship. The sophist is described as a complex beast (*Soph.* 226a) whose expertise is diverse (*Soph.* 223c), suggesting that anyone with expertise in sophistry is protean and polymathic. Immediately following the first six division trees, however, the Eleatic Stranger stresses that the sophist merely “appears to have expert knowledge of lots of things” and that anyone picturing sophistry this way “can’t be seeing clearly” (*Soph.* 232a). The ensuing discussion establishes the sophist as “a cheat and an imitator” (*Soph.* 235b). As we might expect, given the criticism leveled against sophists throughout Plato’s writings, the art of sophistry is understood to proceed from ignorance. Sophists are talented pseudo-educators, manufacturing what only appears to be knowledge and profiting from these imitations by holding them for ransom to an elite who, at best, learn



to imitate the imitators. The implication is that sophistry comes in many forms—that we can see them as educators, debaters, or even scholars—but that with each form it takes, sophistry reveals itself as essentially ugly (*Soph.* 228a), insincere (*Soph.* 268a), and exploitative (*Soph.* 223a). Methodologically, the suggestion is more basic: only with a sustained inquiry will sophistry reveal its true essence. Six failed attempts and a protracted discussion on the nature of false appearance are required before the sophist is truly unveiled. Much like the historical sophists who perambulate like traveling salesmen in ancient city-states, the art of sophistry surfaces in every series of divisions made in the *Sophist*.<sup>21</sup>

Statesmanship, on the other hand, is elusive, only gradually emerging from the thicket of contending arts that mask its true form. There is only one account of the statesman to match the seven accounts of the sophist, and in the digressions in the *Statesman* we learn that, in any city, only “one or two, or, at most, a select few” could possess the art of the statesman, it being so rare (*Pol.* 293a). In the *Gorgias*, for instance, Socrates claims that he is the only true statesman currently alive in all of Athens (*Gorg.* 521c). This contrasts sharply with the opinion, articulated best in Protagoras’ myth, that everyone is innately endowed with an equal share of the art of politics.<sup>22</sup> Thus, whereas sophists are easy to spot yet difficult to accurately characterize, statesmen are difficult to find just because what characterizes them is something commonplace and thought to belong to everyone.

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<sup>21</sup> The best account of the historical sophists remains Guthrie’s *Sophists*. But see also Gagarin, “Sophists,” for an explanation of exactly what the sophists were teaching, apart from the art of persuasion.

<sup>22</sup> Everyone must share in the art of politics, according to Protagoras, otherwise “cities would never come to be” (*Prot.* 322d). Cf. *Euthd.* 293b.

The structure of the respective dialogues reflects this, and I return to this point in discussing the nature of statesmanship (see 4.2, below).

The divisions in the *Statesman* are unique in other ways. For instance, some of the divisions are flawed in instructive ways. The myth is told with the ostensive purpose to a correct the mistaken interpretation of statesman as rearing humans, rather than merely taking care of them. Statesmen are “caretakers” (ἐπιμελητής); they do not “rear” (τρέφω) humans like a herdsman rears animals (*Pol.* 276ab). This semantic point is taken seriously enough for the Stranger to insist on a long digression to draw out the mistake.<sup>23</sup> But another example is more revealing. After only a few divisions—having decided that statesmanship is a species of directive theoretical knowledge issuing its own orders for the production of living objects, specifically the breeding and nurture of herd animals—the Stranger hands the account over to Young Socrates. The Stranger asks Young Socrates to make a division, and the latter offers that “the division is to be made between the nurture of men and nurture of beasts” (*Pol.* 262a). While the Stranger applauds Young Socrates’ courage in making this division, he explains that it is nonetheless mistaken. Herd animals should not be so carelessly divided into humans and beasts because it is “safer to go down the middle” in making divisions rather than breaking off a small fragment (*Pol.* 262c). Much ink has been spilled on this instruction to make divisions through the middle, and this passage is discussed below, but it here suffices to point out that flawed divisions are used in the *Statesman* to draw out

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<sup>23</sup> See 3.1, below. Also, Sayre, *MMPS*, 21-25, offers a persuasive elucidation of the exact nature of this mistake.

instructive methodological principles.<sup>24</sup> The divisions in the *Sophist* are not instructive in the same way. The divisions are not flawed and there is little methodological discussion.<sup>25</sup> In keeping with the nature of sophistry, perhaps, the Stranger is more concerned in the *Sophist* with a mere display of the method. In the *Statesman*, and likewise parallel with its subject, the Stranger insists on a meticulous examination of the rules and on rectifying any errors that lead them astray.

Finally, divisions in the *Statesman* distinguish groups that can be arranged hierarchically. The relationship between the divided parts is understood in terms of a ranked order. Statesmanship controls (ἰσχυρῶ) generalship, judgeship, and rhetoric (*Pol.* 305d), and by employing the method of division, a dialectician is meant to understand why. This aspect of the method of division is peculiar to the *Statesman*. In fact, in the *Sophist*, the divided parts are explicitly proscribed any evaluation: “For the time being, the method has only tried to distinguish” kinds from one another and “doesn’t care one way or another” which are most appropriate, but rather “it values them all equally” (*Soph.* 227a-c). The method exhibited in the *Sophist* is used exclusively for identifying the distinguishing features of the parts that are divided. And this is true for much of the *Statesman* as well.

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<sup>24</sup> I explore this point further in the following section (see 2.2, below). For scholarship on this passage, see Stenzel, *Method of Dialectic*, 92. Stenzel argues that at the root of the instruction is a point about proceeding comprehensively through divisions. Skemp, *Statesman*, 135 n. 1, reiterates this point, highlighting its status as a “rule.” But see also Dorter, *FGPED*, 189, for the claim that we should notice a particular insight concerning rationality as a differentia for humans. And finally, Taylor, *Sophist and Statesman*, 200, regards this passage as providing an occasion for the example that follows of the erroneous (but prevailing) division of humans into Greeks and barbarians.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., the success of Theaetetus’ first division at *Soph.* 225e.

In spite of the passage from the *Sophist* cited above, many scholars maintain the view that the relationship between parts and wholes is fundamentally hierarchical—in terms of generality. Moravcsik understands the divided part as a subclass with defining terms and distinguishing features that are less general than the classes from which they derive.<sup>26</sup> Others adopt an Aristotelian view in thinking of the relationship in terms of genera and species.<sup>27</sup> As Sayre argues, however, there is no reason to think that the arts are arranged according to their generality. Scholars who see it that way, he believes, are trying to fit Plato's method of division into an Aristotelian mold.<sup>28</sup> Such debates often tread on an abstraction of the method at the expense (if not the shirking) of content. In both the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, divisions are almost exclusively made to categorize types of knowledge. The correct classification of *epistemai* is crucial to a well functioning city. In general, the divisions of the arts in the city parallel the specialization of roles detailed in the *Republic* and *Laws*. Nevertheless, the divisions proceed as they do throughout the *Sophist* without any discussion of their relative rank or authority. It is not before *Pol.* 281d that the method of division adopts the additional function of arranging the divided parts in a hierarchical order.<sup>29</sup>

The reason offered by the Stranger for ranking the arts in this way stems from the limits implicit in the sphere of expertise tied to a particular kind of knowledge. For any

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<sup>26</sup> Moravcsik, "Anatomy," 172. See also White, *Knowledge and Reality*, 120, for a similar view.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Cornford, *Theory of Knowledge*, 270; Meinwald, *Plato's Parmenides*, 182; and Teloh, *Development*, 67-68.

<sup>28</sup> Sayre, *MMPS*, 61.

<sup>29</sup> This is what I call the "second stage" in a series of divisions (see 2.2.2, below).

given art there is another (higher) art whose province it is to decide on the application of that art (*Pol.* 304b). Rhetoric is responsible for the task of persuading a mass audience, but it does not fall to the art of rhetoric to decide when speeches should be implemented (*Pol.* 304d). Rhetors decide *how* an audience should be persuaded, but only the statesman controls *when*.<sup>30</sup> Rhetoric and statesmanship are related insofar as they both contribute to the caretaking of the city. However, the former is but an auxiliary of the latter. Likewise, generals and judges must act as servants to statesman (*Pol.* 305a). It is the responsibility of statesman to control generals, rhetors, and judges. In the weaving example offered in the middle of the *Statesman*, the art of weaving is analogously distinguished from several arts that could lay claim to being in charge of clothes-making (*Pol.* 281b). The art of the fuller along with the arts of spinning and carding all contribute to the production of clothes. The weaving example will be discussed at length (see 2.2, below), yet it suffices to point out here that the reason these contributory arts are subordinate to the art of weaving is that weaving takes the products of those arts and ultimately combines them into a finished product—viz., clothes. Only the weaver fashions clothes. Likewise, only the statesman fashions the laws that constitute the city. Statesmen combine the products of the subordinate arts in the city in the appropriate way for a harmonious political order, to weave the fabric of society (so to speak).

Thus, the divisions in the *Statesman* differ from those in the *Sophist*. Only one series of divisions is provided to account for statesmanship. Many divisions are made for instructive reasons, and the discussion of methodological rules parallels the laws given by

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<sup>30</sup> See 4.3, below. See also Lane, *MPPS*, 141-142, for the case that it is *de rigueur* for statesmen to rule and direct subordinate arts, and for the role that correct timing plays in governance.

the statesman. Moreover, the divided parts fall into a hierarchy, and the method provides a scheme with which the civic chain of command can be established. At the top of this chain, statesmen issue rules to which they themselves are not subject.<sup>31</sup> It is not particularly surprising, then, to find that the Stranger is similarly above his own law regarding dichotomous division

## 2.2 The Scope of Division

For the most part in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, general kinds are divided into two *and only two* subkinds, one of which is in turn divided into two more kinds and so forth (see Appendix A). The Stranger explicitly prefers dichotomous divisions. So it is odd to find him midway through the *Statesman* troubled by the difficulty of dichotomous division and opting instead to proceed “limb by limb” (*Pol.* 287c3) with a non-dichotomous division.

What this means is a puzzle for those interested in Plato’s method of division. A few scholars have suggested explanations. Dorter believes the move is made to accommodate value distinctions.<sup>32</sup> Miller goes as far as to suggest that it introduces a new mode of dialectic.<sup>33</sup> Others caution against such claims. Chiara-Quenzer explicitly defends the view that the method is preserved and that only the immediate goals of division have

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<sup>31</sup> This contrasts with the rule of law, something that is recommended in the absence of statesmen (see 4.4, below).

<sup>32</sup> Dorter, *FGPED*, 191.

<sup>33</sup> Miller, “God-Given Way,” 324.

changed.<sup>34</sup> Sayre explains the puzzle by suggesting that it marks a return to a previously endorsed procedure.<sup>35</sup> I want to offer a different explanation for the puzzle, and one I think explains the Stranger's move without diminishing the importance of dichotomy for the method of division in the *Statesman*.

I submit that the key to understanding the Stranger's non-dichotomous division lies in the weaving model that is provided just beforehand. Two stages are needed to uncover the art of weaving. One stage locates the *product* of weaving. The next stage focuses on the *process* by which the product comes to be. The second stage distinguishes all those arts involved in the production process, an important distinction because not all arts stand in the same relation to the product. The more arts that come to be involved in the process, the more difficult it is to see which art is proper to the product—since there can be only one. With each cooperative art, the inquiry must go deeper. In the case of statesmanship, the cooperative arts are many. So many, in fact, that inquiry into statesmanship would be nearly endless were it to remove by dichotomous division all the cooperative arts. Non-dichotomous division in the *Statesman* is a bypass the Stranger employs in order to group contending arts so that they can be distinguished from statesmanship. More generally, non-dichotomous division is a tool the dialectician can use to limit the field of inquiry.

A few preliminaries are here worth noting. In the Platonic corpus, the method of division is closely associated with the science of dialectic.<sup>36</sup> Scholars tend to see dialectic

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<sup>34</sup> Chiara-Quenzer, "Purpose," 103-106.

<sup>35</sup> That of *Phaedrus* 266b: see Sayre, *MMPS*, 126.

<sup>36</sup> See esp. *Soph.* 253cd.

as a method of knowledge acquisition, and it is perhaps best taken to refer to “the ideal method, whatever that may be.”<sup>37</sup> So it is of considerable importance for scholars to establish the connection between dialectic and division. Some scholars argue that Plato ultimately held division to be the only method by which inquiry could be successfully conducted.<sup>38</sup> Others suggest a strong connection to the method of hypothesis spelled out in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Rep.* IV.<sup>39</sup> Most, however, consider the method of division to be just one facet of dialectic that also includes hypothesis and the elenchus.<sup>40</sup>

Whatever its relationship to dialectic, division in the *Statesman* appears to be a method for generating an account or definition of something.<sup>41</sup> The Eleatic Stranger is found making divisions into general kinds, often with some brief description of the sub-kind (perhaps counting as the “collection”) before the latter are again divided.<sup>42</sup> The aim it seems is to generate a definition for the thing in question.<sup>43</sup> There has also been considerable debate over the question of what exactly is being divided. Most scholars take the position that it is the forms that are divided, but suggestions have been made that

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<sup>37</sup> Robinson, *Earlier Dialectic*, 70.

<sup>38</sup> See Ryle, “Parmenides II,” 321-2.

<sup>39</sup> See Dorter, *FGPED*, 13ff. This is related to the old (see Cornford, *Theory of Knowledge*) and very recent (see Sedley, “Second Voyage”) belief that the method of hypothesis underlies many dialogues in subtle ways.

<sup>40</sup> See Notomi, “Metaphysics and Dialectic,” 207-209. Furthermore, Benson, “Plato’s Method,” succinctly explains the consensus and the textual evidence on which it rests.

<sup>41</sup> Cf., however, Skemp, *Statesman*, 67, who suggests the elaborate divisions represent Plato satirizing the Academy’s obsession with the method.

<sup>42</sup> See n. 16 above. See also Henry, “Sharp Eye,” 232-4 for the argument that the procedure does in fact collect after each division. For Henry, division is not a linear method as many authors have taken it to be. Sayre, *MMPS*, 49, with one such typical view, thinks that collection ultimately gets rejected and the method becomes a method of division only.

<sup>43</sup> See Henry, “Sharp Eye,” 234-239.



what gets divided are classes of forms or even classes of particulars.<sup>44</sup> For my part, and for the purpose of my argument, the question lacks pertinence. It is worth noting, however, that divisions in the *Statesman* are also performed on numbers (*Pol.* 262de) and particulars (*Pol.* 279c). The extent of material upon which division operates seems to have escaped the notice of commentators insistent on connecting (or contrasting) division with the theory of forms.<sup>45</sup> As I argue in the subsequent chapters, the correct application of the method of division is relevant for distinguishing between the cosmic eras described in the myth (*Pol.* 272b) and for demarcating counterfeit political constitutions (*Pol.* 293e). Furthermore, the Stranger eschews technical terms, promising Young Socrates (and, we should hope, readers today) that “if you persevere in not paying close attention to names, you will be seen to be richer in wisdom as you advance to old age” (*Pol.* 261e). Ostensibly, Plato uses the terms *genos*, *meros*, and *eidos* interchangeably in the *Statesman* to refer to the kinds and subkinds that are divided.<sup>46</sup> With persistent effort surveying the several dialogues where the method of division is discussed, something might be said about the objects of division.<sup>47</sup> However, from the perspective of the

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<sup>44</sup> See Cohen, “Method of Division,” 182 for a brief taxonomy of the scholarly debate.

<sup>45</sup> To find scholarship on the division of numbers and particulars, we have to go back to 1903, with Shorey, *Unity*, 31, ascribing the interpretation to Benjamin Jowett. For one more instance, *Gorg.* 464a-465d is an especially suitable candidate for an early division in the corpus, yet this division is entirely neglected by recent scholars. This is despite the fact that Socrates waxes metaphysical at length about how the “the world according to Anaxagoras would prevail” without actual divisions in the arts and the soul (*Gorg.* 465d). Alas, the nature of the object to which the method of division is applied in the *Statesman*, along with its metaphysical implications, are never discussed in that dialogue. In the *Statesman*, to say it plainly, division is just a method.

<sup>46</sup> See Skemp, *Statesman*, 130 n. 1, for “remarkable evidence of Plato’s avoidance of technical terms.”

<sup>47</sup> And has, perhaps best in Moravcsik, “Anatomy.”

*Statesman*, and in order to understand the scope of division, a firm position on this otherwise important matter is unnecessary.

In the *Sophist*, however, all of the divisions are dichotomous. Through much of the *Statesman*, the divisions are dichotomous as well. The tendency is not unintentional. The Stranger notes his preference for bipartite divisions in several places. Not only should divisions be dichotomous, they should aim at cutting as close to the middle as possible. Let us return to the example cited above (see 2.1) when Young Socrates attempts to divide herd animals into human and non-human. The Stranger responds with finesse before offering his criticism:

**Stranger:** You've made a very keen and courageous division! But let's try to avoid *this* happening to us again. □

**Young Socrates:** What sort of thing?

**Stranger:** Let's not take off one small part on its own, leaving many large ones behind, and without reference to real classes; let the part bring a real class along with it. It's a really fine thing to separate off immediately what one is searching for from the rest, if one gets it right—as you thought you had the right division, just before, and hurried the argument on, seeing it leading to human beings; but in fact, my friend, it's not safe to make thin cuts; it's safe to go along cutting through the middle of things, and that way one will be more likely to encounter real class. (*Pol.* 262ab)

The recommendation to cut through the middle is suggested as a way to avoid falling into error. It locates real classes. Moreover, the Stranger wants to avoid making the same error again. So why does the Stranger later make non-dichotomous cuts? How is this non-dichotomous limb-by-limb division justified?

Few commentators have bothered to notice this, and even fewer have tried to explain it. Rowe discusses the dialogue at length without ever seeming to notice that half

way through the cuts made are no longer strictly dichotomous.<sup>48</sup> Skemp, in his extensively footnoted translation, has a note concerning “limb-by-limb division” (at *Pol.* 287c), but alas it points only to a literary reference to sacrificial butchering.<sup>49</sup> Taylor notes the puzzle, but offers little more than the Stranger does by way of explanation.<sup>50</sup> Sayre, who provides substantial detail on the issue, concludes simply that this is but a return to the method previously endorsed in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>51</sup>

Dorter has perhaps the most interesting suggestion.<sup>52</sup> He argues that the non-dichotomous divisions are an advance in the method made to accommodate value distinctions. This reading makes sense, however, only if we accept Dorter’s larger thesis concerning the development of the so-called Eleatic Dialogues as a whole.<sup>53</sup> For reasons I discuss below, Dorter’s claim, even if it is right, is not correctly focused because the inclusion of value distinctions is better said to have entered the account earlier in the *Statesman* and before the introduction of non-dichotomous division.

Miller argues that dichotomous divisions can single out the statesman, but that they prevent statesmanship from being completely revealed.<sup>54</sup> Dichotomous division, he

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<sup>48</sup> See Rowe, *Plato: Statesman*, ix-xxi. See also Rowe, *Reading the Statesman*: none of the articles in this extensive collection discuss the matter at all.

<sup>49</sup> Skemp, *Statesman*, 178 n. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, *Sophist and Statesman*, 224.

<sup>51</sup> Sayre, *MMPS*, 126.

<sup>52</sup> Dorter, *FGPED*, 189-191 and *passim*.

<sup>53</sup> The Eleatic Dialogues are the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*, so-called due to the fact that Eleatics are not only present but dominate the conversation in these dialogues.

<sup>54</sup> Miller, “God-Given Way,” 326-328.

thinks, conceals the essential character of the statesman because the cooperative arts of the polis are an “organic totality” that require non-dichotomous division to expose. For Miller, non-dichotomous division is a new mode of dialectic that pertains to particular objects of definition. If this is true, however, then it is odd that the Stranger is elsewhere so reluctant to endorse such liberties in the method. Moreover, Miller’s argument depends on his view that the dichotomous divisions are in fact collections of a single form that, once they reach a certain point, can only be cut up non-dichotomously.

Chiara-Quenzer’s solution to the puzzle is to suggest that non-dichotomous division complements the preceding dichotomous division.<sup>55</sup> She argues that the goals of the inquiry have changed. With dichotomous divisions, the Stranger is simply trying to locate the statesman. The non-dichotomous division adds to the goals of division the classification of the other contributory arts. Because the goals have changed, so too has the manner of inquiry. This reading comes closest to my own, and yet I cannot help but think that Chiara-Quenzer’s solution is much too simplistic. The goals have indeed changed, and there is a move to classify the other arts, but Chiara-Quenzer fails to explain why there is suddenly a need to do so and why the goals have changed. Moreover, it is unclear how this provokes the need to divide non-dichotomously. In the weaving example, the cooperative arts are classified in the same fashion—except there, the classification is conducted dichotomously.

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<sup>55</sup> Chiara-Quenzer, “Purpose,” 100-103.

Contra much of the scholarship respecting this puzzle, my answer attempts to preserve the ideal of dichotomous division while at the same time explaining why the Stranger proceeds in any case limb-by-limb. To present this reading, something will need to be said about the weaving model.

### 2.2.1 The First Stage: Locating the Proper Object

The first stage in defining the art of weaving is to locate its product. The Stranger develops an account that ultimately divides into “clothes” rather than “weaving.” This division begins with the general class of “things we make and acquire” (*Pol.* 279c7). That is, the group to be divided is a group of products.

Ten dichotomous cuts are made to this group before arriving at the sub-kind ‘clothes.’ An important passage follows this arrival as the Stranger connects this group to weaving:

**Stranger:** Shall we call this sort “the art of clothes-making,” from the thing itself? And shall we say that weaving too, in so far as it represented the largest part of the manufacture of clothes, does not differ at all, except in name, from this art of clothes-making? (*Pol.* 280a)

And Young Socrates agrees they should. Unlike in the hunt for the statesman, which begins by cutting into knowledge, the hunt for weaving begins with artifacts.<sup>56</sup> But why should the Stranger assign clothes-making to weavers rather than, say, carders or woof-spinners?

This is an important question. Many kinds of expertise are involved in clothes-making. Yet the Stranger claims that weaving has “the largest (μεγίστον) part of the

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<sup>56</sup> Notably, these are the only divisions of sensible objects in the entire corpus.

manufacture of clothes” (*Pol.* 280a4). In fact, according to the Stranger weaving and the art of clothes-making are identical; they differ only in name (ὄνοματι, *Pol.* 280a). While this may be true, it is certainly unclear at this point why the production of clothes properly belongs to the art of weaving and not, say, the art of carding. The account thus far is true but unclear and incomplete (*Pol.* 281d2). The need to extend the division with a second stage, as we shall see, stems from the need to clarify the identification of an expertise with its proper object.

Before moving to the second stage, the Stranger—noting that Young Socrates has missed something—provides a list of related but distinct arts (*Pol.* 280b8-e4). These arts have already been removed in the division. Cobbling, for example, has been removed because a division was made that separated “compound put-round coverings” into those bound together with perforation and those bound without perforation. Leather, for example, is stitched together and cloth is woven. By making the division where he did, the Stranger has removed the ambiguity that might otherwise conflate weaving and cobbling.

Notice that in developing this list of arts, the Stranger is considering the left-hand side of the division. Typically, when a division is made, the left side is merely named and left unexplored. In the *Sophist*, the Stranger instructs Theaetetus to “always follow the right-hand part of what we’ve cut” (*Soph.* 264e). The development of the left-hand side of the division tree is unique to the *Statesman*. The arts that would fall to the left are, in the weaving example, listed for the sake of illustrating a point that Young Socrates has

apparently missed.<sup>57</sup> The Stranger is drawing our attention to the left-hand sides of a division because it is on that side where all expertise not responsible for clothes-making must fall. Cobbling may be related to weaving, but it is a different craft with distinct products. Alas, a cobbler is unlikely to consider his craft the art of clothes production. At most, cobbling is similar. But there are other arts with a stronger claim to clothes-making.

Indeed weaving is not the only art that concerns clothes. It is not even the only art involved in the production of clothes. The Stranger points to the art of carding and the art of fulling. There are additional arts as well: there is expertise with regard to the cleaning and furbishing of clothes, and with the mending of clothes. There are those who spin the woof and the warp. These arts cooperate in the production of clothes. And they have a credible claim to being the proper art of clothes-making. Those with expertise in these cooperative arts will question why only weaving is the art proper to clothes-making, much like how the generals and judges can ask why their respective arts are not proper to human caretaking. As the Stranger observes, they “will dispute (ἀμφισβητήσω) the role of looking after and producing clothes” with the art of weaving (*Pol.* 281b7). The second stage of the account promises to resolve this dispute.

### 2.2.2 The Second Stage: Removing Competitors

At the first stage of the series of divisions leading to the art of weaving, the account has located the product of weaving. It has found that the art of weaving is identical with the art of making clothes. Furthermore, it has removed related crafts, such

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<sup>57</sup> At *Pol.* 280b5, Young Socrates confusedly asks for clarification.

as cobbling. The Stranger has been careful not to permit related crafts, such as cobbling, from being conflated with weaving. And yet the division is still incomplete. It needs to remove the many cooperative arts (*Pol.* 281d2) that are also involved in the production of clothes. More divisions, and more left-hand divisions are on the way.

Cooperative arts, like carding, are credible contenders to the art of making clothes, and the second stage of the account of weaving is necessary for removing them. To do this, the Stranger distinguishes contributory causes from direct causes.<sup>58</sup> The former group includes the arts that do not in fact make the product but that instead provide the tools for doing so. Shuttle- and spindle-making, the products of carpentry, provide the tools for the weaver and belong in this class.<sup>59</sup>

In the case of weaving, these contributory arts are those “concerned with [the production of] spindles and shuttles and whatever other tools share in the process of production in relation to garments” (*Pol.* 281e7). There is some reason for thinking that this is a difficult group to divide.<sup>60</sup> One might wonder about the tools the carpenter uses

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<sup>58</sup> Commentators vary in their estimations of what this distinction means. Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, 84, thinks it “isn't very interesting.” Skemp, *Statesman*, 167 n. 1, notes the peculiarity of having contributory arts “on the same footing” rather than subordinate, about which see 2.1, above. There are other places in the corpus that make the same distinction (see, e.g., *Tim.* 46c and *Phdo.* 99b) and this is the very next division that the Stranger makes when he and Young Socrates return to their account of statesmanship.

<sup>59</sup> Notice in the *Cratylus*, the same example is given. A weaver uses a shuttle well, but the shuttle is the product of a carpenter. Socrates asks, “is everyone a carpenter or only those who possess the craft of carpentry” (*Crat.* 388c) to illustrate that knowing how to use a product is not the same as knowing how to produce it. Weaving is the expertise relating to clothes, not shuttles. Cause implies responsibility for Plato (re which, see Skemp, 167 n. 1), and the responsibility for the clothes lies with the weaver, not with the carpenter. Likewise, the responsibility for shuttles lies with the carpenter and not the weaver.

<sup>60</sup> Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, 86 (who finds the distinction otherwise uninteresting, see n. 58, above) notes this worry and decides that the cut must be an arbitrary one. I see little evidence for thinking that the Stranger would agree, however. Dorter, *FGPED*, 200, thinks contributory causes of clothes are the material causes and that the direct causes are teleological. That would be fine if it were clearly the case that



to make the shuttle used by the weaver. Do the carpenter's tools count as tools that share in the production process? If they do, then the blacksmith must be included alongside the carpenter. Also, we might question what counts as a tool. And indeed, the Stranger notes exactly this before non-dichotomously dividing the contributory arts of the city. The difficulty in dividing the group of contributory arts is crucial for understanding why the Stranger needs non-dichotomous division. Before turning to that question, though, more needs to be said about the weaver model.

Unlike in the case of the contributory arts of the state, as we shall see, there is no need for any divisions of arts that contribute to weaving. Such contributory arts have no credible claim to the art of clothes-making in the way that some of the contributory arts to statesmanship have to the art of human caretaking. A carpenter making a shuttle for the weaver to use has no credible claim to being a clothes-maker. Less so for the blacksmith. Both carpenter and blacksmith, however, (in constructing shelters and armor, for instance) have a viable claim to being a human caretaker.

Where there is a dispute over the proper object of an art, the dialectician faces a more difficult task. The weaver model illustrates this. Unlike carpentry and the contributory arts, the cooperative arts that fall under the direct causes of the production of clothes do have a credible claim to being the art proper to clothes-making. Carders (i.e.,

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weaving and carding did not also provide the material conditions for clothes. But arguably weaving and carding are material causes in just the same way that spindle-makers are. Moreover, the spindle-maker is connected to clothes-making in the same teleological sense that woof-spinners are.

those who align the fibers of the wool in the first place) may perhaps wonder why their craft is not the “largest part of the manufacture of clothes” (*Pol.* 280a4).

To remove a cooperative art, the dialectician needs to define it, and that deepens the inquiry. The second stage of the division investigates the process by which the art brings about its product. The investigation of the production process is in fact an extensive inquiry into the contending cooperative arts of the product.

The challenge in removing a contending art, such as carding, is to assign that art its proper object. That means defining it.<sup>61</sup> Notice that each contending art is defined through dichotomous division. The art of carding belongs to the art of wool-working—as weaving does—but carding merely produces the wool, the material for the clothes. Wool is a product of carding; clothes are not. To be sure, more than one product can be proper to some single art, but (as discussed above) only one art is properly assigned to each product. The art of the fuller, for instance, includes furbishing and mending (282a5). A carder can produce woolen or worsted yarn. But carding can never produce clothes.

Returning to the contributory arts, like carpentry: unless it is clear that the contributory causes are in fact merely contributory, they must be divided and defined as well. In the case of statesmanship, we will see that the Stranger immediately worries that in the case of contributory arts of the city, it is a “difficult thing in separating this class [of contributory arts] from the rest” (287d5)

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<sup>61</sup> The Stranger, having just defined carding and before introducing the manufacture of warp and woof, proposes to Young Socrates, “Well, define (διопρίζω) each of these two things too; perhaps you might find defining them timely” (*Pol.* 282e1). Unsurprisingly, Young Socrates replies by simply asking the Stranger to do it. The Stranger then proceeds by detailing the products of carding, warp-spinning, and so on.

Thus, when a cooperative art (contributory or not) has a credible claim to the product, it must be removed through division. Even though the goal is to define weaving, the definition must clearly demarcate cooperative contending arts by defining each of them in turn to reveal the product for which they are responsible. If the disputes are not resolved, the definition will be neither clear nor complete.

Disputes between competing arts can only be resolved through an extensive inquiry into what the proper products of the contending art in fact are (since the disputant artisan claims that it is identical to the art in question).<sup>62</sup> In order to remove the contesting arts, the left side of the division tree must be developed—because, to remove a contesting art, it must be placed and so defined by dichotomous division. This is no easy process, and one that is made all the more difficult by the presence of several contenders. Regarding who is most responsible for the care of humans, the list of contenders is very large indeed. Let us turn now to the Stranger’s use of non-dichotomous division in an effort to get around this daunting task.

### 2.2.3 Why Non-Dichotomous Division is Needed

After a long digression that included among other things the weaver model itself, the tireless Stranger and the enduring Young Socrates again resume their inquiry into statesmanship. It will be helpful to quote the passage at length:

**Visitor:** Well then, the king has been separated off from the many sorts of expertise that share his field—or rather from all of them concerned with

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<sup>62</sup> The *Cratylus* is again relevant here: “And who can best supervise the work of a rule-setter, whether here or abroad, and judge its products? Isn’t it whoever will use them?” (*Crat.* 390c). Contributory arts are responsible for making the products used by another art—a supervisory art to which other contributory arts are subordinate.

herds; there remain, we are saying, those sorts of expertise in the city itself that are contributory causes and those that are causes, which we must first divide from each other.

**Young Socrates:** Correct. □

**Stranger:** So do you recognize that it is difficult to cut them into two? The cause, I think, will become more evident if we proceed. □

**Young Socrates:** Well, then that's what we should do. □

**Stranger:** Then, let's divide limb by limb, like a sacrificial animal since we can't do it into two. For we must always cut into the nearest number so far as we can. □

**Young Socrates:** So how are we to do it in this case? □

**Stranger:** Just as before: the sorts of expertise that provided tools relating to weaving—all of these, of course, we put down then as contributory causes. □

**Young Socrates:** Yes.

**Stranger:** We must do the same thing now too, but to still a greater degree than we did then. For we must put down as being contributory causes all the sorts of expertise that produce any tool in the city, whether small or large. Without these there would never come to be a city, nor statesmanship, but on the other hand we shan't, I think, put down any of them as the product of the expertise of the king. □

**Young Socrates:** No, we shan't. □

**Stranger:** And yet we're trying to do a difficult thing in separating this class of things from the rest; in fact it is possible for someone to treat anything you like as a tool of *something* and seem to have said something credible. (*Pol.* 287b-d)

The first thing to notice is that kingship stands in the same relation to the statesmanship as clothes-making does to weaving. Near the beginning of the *Statesman*, the Stranger points out a problem with the account of statesmen as kingly herdsmen of humans. The problem is that no group disputes with cowherds that it, and not the cowherd, is responsible for the care of the herd. However, in the case of human caretaking, millers and bakers and the “tens of thousands of others who dispute the title” contend this title with the statesman (*Pol.* 268c3). These accusations must be answered. To do so, the contenders must be removed from the account. In doing so, the statesman will be distilled, as it were: “reveal him on his own, uncontaminated with anyone else” (*Pol.* 268c10). Of course, there are many arts that cooperate with statesmanship—generalship, for instance—just as there are arts like the carder's that cooperate with weaving. In the

model, only weaving was identical to clothes-making. Likewise here, only statesmanship is identical with care of humans. The task then is to demonstrate that identity. The Stranger appears ready to begin in just the same way, by separating the contributory arts from those that directly concern human caring.

Instead of proceeding in like manner, however, the Stranger suggests they proceed non-dichotomously. The reason for doing so, he says, “will become more evident if we proceed.” As they proceed, they immediately run into problems even in trying to decide which things are contributory, since what counts as a tool when it comes to human care-giving is not altogether clear. Because it is not immediately clear what the contributory arts of the city are, the Stranger must deepen the inquiry by making cuts into the contributory causes of the city. The account must capture and separate all the contributory arts, including all the tools. This is certainly daunting, made worse by the fact it is not even clear what constitutes a tool. Those problems aside, the Stranger manages to divide all contributory arts into seven kinds of productive arts: namely those arts relating to the production of tools, vessels, vehicles, defenses, playthings, basic materials, and nourishments (see Appendix A).<sup>63</sup>

These divisions are conducted non-dichotomously because they pick out classes under which more than one kind of expertise applies. I have argued that only one art can properly govern the production of some particular product. With respect to the class of

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<sup>63</sup> Note that the Stranger predicts that many things will not fit neatly into one of the seven classes. Currency, seals, and engravings, for instance, will have to be forcibly placed—some under tools and others under playthings (*Pol.* 289b3).

defenses, for instance, the Stranger notes that it includes the production of “all clothing, most armor, and walls, all those encirclements made out of earth, or out of stone” (*Pol.* 288b2). If the account of contributory arts proceeded dichotomously, it would need to lay out in detail the expertise proper to each product of the contributory cause.

The division of the contributory arts, moreover, is not the only non-dichotomous division. I have argued above that in the weaver model, separating the weaver from those contenders to the art of making clothes meant an elaborate division that defined the contending arts by dichotomously developing the left-hand side of the account to reveal the proper role of each contending cooperative art in the production of clothes. The non-dichotomous division here of contributory political arts is intended to separate enough of the “tens of thousands” to render manageable the class of credibly contending arts directly involved in the caring of humans.

Likewise, in separating the statesman from contenders to the art of kingship, an elaborate division is necessary. However, for it to yield an account similar to that of weaving, it must proceed by developing the left-hand side. Only then will it be clear that statecraft is identical with kingship.

The separation of the contending arts to kingship likewise cannot proceed dichotomously and define every cooperative art with a credible claim to being concerned with human care. One of the more obvious contenders to the art of kingship is the sophist, and an entire dialogue has been devoted to providing an account of the (alleged) expertise proper to the art of sophistry. To demand such an account here would make the account of statesmanship tremendously laborious. The Stranger’s remark concerning the sophist

makes this clear: “Although removing him [i.e. the sophist] from among those who really are in possession of the art of statesmanship and kingship is a very difficult thing to do, remove him we must if we are going to see plainly what we are looking for” (*Pol.* 391c)

The second-stage in the hunt for statesmanship requires a thorough investigation into the process by which statesmen employ their expertise. It furthermore requires an investigation into the cooperative arts such as the arts of the general and judge so as to separate them and define their place qua caretakers of the human community distinct from the role of the statesman. There are also a number of imitators to the art of kingship that must be removed. To ask the dialectician to proceed dichotomously through each of these arts is to demand that the left-hand side of the account be developed such that each of the contending arts is demonstrably dismissed. To ask this of the dialectician is to ask for a definition for each and every contending cooperative art involved in the affairs of the state—a separate account for each respective contender that proves that their expertise is not identical with that of kingship. This is to ask, in effect, for something practically impossible.

Non-dichotomous division, then, permits the dialectician to get around the need to remove contending arts from the definition with the usual (and generally preferred) dichotomous method. The usual method is to develop an account of the contending art in order to prove that its proper object is not identical with the proper object of the art it is contending. The art of statesmanship is identical with the art of kingship, and no other art can make the same claim once it has been defined. Non-dichotomous division allows the dialectician to group various kinds of expertise together to avoid separating them

individually with this laborious process. It is a useful tool necessary for limiting the inquiry into subjects as diverse as politics.

Thus, the peculiarities to the method in the *Statesman* are important for shedding light on both the flexibility of the method and the subject of the dialogue—namely, statesmanship. In the following chapter, I discuss the myth and its place in the *Statesman*. Whereas scholars have much to say about the myth itself, it is almost always treated separately from the method and the politics in the dialogue. I believe there is a demonstrable case for reading the myth as integral to the dialogue as a whole.

## 2.3 Summary

In this chapter, I argued that the divisions in the *Statesman* are unique, and that this is because of the nature of the expertise of statesmanship. Statesmanship involves rules, and it involves the appropriate hierarchical arrangement of the subordinate arts in the city. Accordingly, the methodology in the *Statesman* concerns the rules for divisions, and it concerns a way to arrange and rank the parts of the whole. No other dialogue mentions rules for division, and in no other dialogue are parts arranged hierarchically. In the *Sophist*, the method is merely displayed and never discussed, and it is displayed a number of times by generating different accounts of the same thing—sophistry. This illustrates something about sophistry: sophists merely display, and they come in many forms. Likewise, the method in the *Statesman* is revealing of its subject matter: statesmen make rules, and they manage the parts of the city. Furthermore, statesmen are justified in breaking the rules they have themselves imposed, when doing so benefits the whole. I claimed that the methodological rule to divide dichotomously is analogous to this. The Stranger imposes a rule for dichotomous division that he then breaks in order to facilitate



the inquiry into statesmanship. To explain how this works, I developed an argument for how non-dichotomous division helps the dialectician. In my reading of the *Statesman*, there are two stages to the account of statesmanship. The first stage reveals that statesmanship is the art of caring for humans. But because there are many arts of that sort, a second stage is needed to show that statesmanship is the art *proper* to caring for humans. Both stages involve division, but the second stage must develop the left-hand side of the division in order to successfully remove these contending arts. That is an arduous task, especially when these contenders are many. Non-dichotomous division allows the dialectician to group these arts together so that they can be separated from the statesman. Much as the statesman will ignore general laws when they ought not apply in particular cases, the general rule to perform divisions dichotomously can be broken by a dialectician in the particular case of investigating statesmanship.

## Chapter 3

### 3 Myth

Plato's myths have enjoyed lasting popularity.<sup>64</sup> Whereas scholarship abounds on myth in Plato's dialogues, however, it is often classicists—and not philosophers—who take up the subject.<sup>65</sup> It is for instance unsurprising to find that Blackwell's *Companion to Plato*, an otherwise superlative and comprehensive volume, contains not even a single article on myth. Scholars who do take an interest in Plato's myths typically study the function of myth in Plato's writing, and they tend to discuss particular myths in relation to other myths in the corpus. Only rarely are Plato's myths considered with a view toward understanding the philosophical insights arising out of the text in which they are found.<sup>66</sup>

This is not to say that such investigations are without merit. It is indeed helpful to recognize that, when one is introduced in a dialogue, a myth often serves a rhetorical purpose. The *Republic*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Gorgias* all end with eschatological myths ostensibly intended to persuade the interlocutors—and presumably the reader—to accept the position Socrates has been laboring.

The myth in the *Statesman*, however, is told in the middle of the dialogue and recounted by the Eleatic Stranger on the pretext that it will serve to reveal a deficiency in

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<sup>64</sup> Almost everyone in the West has heard of Atlantis, for instance. And Wells' *Invisible Man* reads even more suspiciously like a retelling of the myth of Gyges' ancestor than does Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

<sup>65</sup> A notable exception is Canadian philosopher Catalin Partenie's 2009 compendium, *Plato's Myths*.

<sup>66</sup> Excepting the work of Leo Strauss, it perhaps goes without saying, and exhibited best in his lecture on the *Republic* in *City and Man*. The danger (and perhaps part of the reason) for Platonic myths taking the academic back seat is the speculative nature of their analysis.

the account of the statesman (*Pol.* 268c). The *Statesman* myth, in other words, performs a critical role. As Kahn argues, it is a “genuine myth,” like the Chariot Myth in the *Phaedrus*: it contains fantastic elements and (whether implicitly or explicitly) contributes in some way to the subsequent argument.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, Horn calls it a “doctrinal myth” because it is told as a means for understanding some point under discussion.<sup>68</sup> Accordingly, the Stranger explains the errors in the account of the statesman that the myth is intended to lay bare (*Pol.* 274e-277a)—viz., the “lesser error” that they neglected to include the manner by which the statesman rules, and the “greater error” that the account thus far implies a ruler who is necessarily divine. Still, the rich detail and complexity to the myth would be unnecessary were this its only purpose.

That the myth exposes these two errors is not its only purpose, as I will argue. Before doing so, however, some of the more challenging features of the myth must be explained. There are numerous aspects to the myth that are worth exploring at some length. I argue that the Stranger is deliberately exploiting Young Socrates’ youth with a fantastic story that cleverly invites his misjudgment. Moreover, the much-overlooked preamble the Stranger provides will be discussed. By this discussion we can establish some coherence to what look like unrelated details in the myth. Subsequently, I argue that the myth in the *Statesman* relates to the dialogue as a whole in two important ways. The first has to do with the juxtaposition of the two eras in the myth: a seemingly ideal era where the rules are always followed and the divisions are clear cut; and a era subject to the demands of

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<sup>67</sup> Kahn, “Myth,” 148.

<sup>68</sup> Horn, “Why Two Epochs,” 401.

practicality, where rules are broken and latitude is expected from rulers. The contrast drawn between these two eras corresponds to the flexibility that is necessarily accorded to the method of division when it is applied to subjects that stray from the ideal. It is in just this manner that the two stages to the account of statesmanship argued for in the previous chapter correspond to the two eras in the myth. The second way the myth connects to the dialogue is by providing a subtle analogy between the ordering of the cosmos and the constitution of a state. Imitation is a central theme in the myth just as it is in the imitative political theory expounded later in the dialogue. True constitutions, the Stranger argues, are those ruled by someone in possession of the art of statesmanship. However, such constitutions are extinct, owing to the corrupting influence of democracy. The second-best constitution, consequently, is the one that most closely imitates the true constitution. In the myth, we find a close parallel to this in the cosmological account given by the Stranger. Without divine guidance, we are told, the motion of the cosmos cannot continue as it did. Its motion is necessarily imitative, and insofar as it imitates this motion well, life on earth is well managed. Before turning to these points, however, a richer understanding of the details in the myth must be cultivated, especially given the volatility of interpretations available in the literature.

### 3.1 Understanding the Myth

The myth in the *Statesman* ranks among the most puzzling in the Platonic corpus. Most recent scholarship is dedicated merely to its exposition.<sup>69</sup> Reinforcing this, the

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<sup>69</sup> Rowe's suggestion that there are three eras, and not two, spawned a wealth of interest in the ambiguities of the text. According to Rowe, the numerous difficulties in the text vanish when we adopt his admittedly turbid interpretation. For the catalysts to this renewed interest in the minor details, see the introduction in

Stranger warns that the story he is about to tell is enigmatic and asks Young Socrates to “pay complete attention” (*Pol.* 268e). He begins by describing two ages: an age when the motions of the cosmos were guided along a circular path by a divine force, and an age during which the god releases control, at which time the universe reverses its circular motion. When the god is at the cosmic helm (as a κυβερνήτης, a metaphor from the text: *Pol.* 272e, 273de), the sun rises in the west and sets in the east.<sup>70</sup> This era is subject to the sovereignty of Cronus. When the god relinquishes control and the universe moves of its own accord—that is, during the present era, when the sun rises in the east and sets in the west—the era is known as the time of Zeus. The god responsible for guiding the universe is the same god who fashioned it: the creator (δημιουργός) and father (*Pol.* 273b). Even though he is never explicitly said to be Cronus, scholars tend to identify the cosmic helmsman with Cronus.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the two ages have come to be known as the Age of Cronus and the Age of Zeus.

Why the cosmos should reverse its motion at all is a puzzle the Stranger is keen to explain. The universe (τὸ πᾶν), he explains, is a living creature (ζῷον) with intelligence (φρόνησις), and retrogradation is intrinsic to it (*Pol.* 269cd). He further notes that the

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Rowe, *Plato: Statesman*, alongside his “Grey-Haired Babies” and a similar interpretation in Brisson, “Interprétation du mythe”. In response, among others: Horn, “Why Two Eras”; McCabe, “Chaos and Control,” and El Murr, “Hesiod.”

<sup>70</sup> Unless we adopt Rowe’s interpretation. See n. 69, above.

<sup>71</sup> There is almost universal consensus on this point. Cf., however, Brisson, “Interprétation du mythe,” 350 n. 4, argues that Zeus and Cronus each signify the same *Timaeus*-like demiurge for their respective ages. Cf. also Castoriadis, *On Plato’s Statesman*, 93, who without offering an explanation claims that the god is “no doubt other than Cronus or Zeus.”

existence of body (σῶμα) in the universe precludes it from remaining permanently in the same condition. As a result, the universe cannot continue along the same path as it did under the guidance of Cronus. Nevertheless, the universe shares in blessed (μακάριος) things, and this compels it to move in a uniform fashion with as little variation to its movement as possible (*Pol.* 269d). The Stranger then offers an account driven by what apparently explains the self-reversal. First, we are told that the universe cannot move perpetually on its own—even though it seems that this serves to explain why it requires the guidance of Cronus in the first place rather than explaining its reverse motion. Second, we cannot hold Cronus responsible for reversing its movement, since causing it to move in opposite directions would violate an established law (θέμις).<sup>72</sup> Finally, the phenomenon cannot be the result of two gods whose thoughts are opposed to one another (φρονοῦντε ἄντοϋς ἄναντία) (*Pol.* 270a). Skemp argues that this final point amounts to a rejection of either Zoroastrian or Empedoclean doctrines of cosmic dualism.<sup>73</sup> Nonetheless, it would be strange to adopt these three reasons as a justification for the cosmic shift. And so, we should not be so quick to accept the Stranger’s conclusion that the “only remaining possibility” is the account that was given initially—that a god is responsible for its motion during one era and that, during the other, the universe moves under its own power in the opposite direction (*Pol.* 270a). We certainly cannot say, with Young Socrates, that the account is “very reasonable (μάλα ἐκόντως)” (*Pol.* 270b). On

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<sup>72</sup> *Pol.* 269e: “not permitted” translates “οὐ θέμις” in Rowe, whereas Skemp offers, “for this would flout eternal decrees.” Skemp thus retains the connection to political law that I will develop in 3.4 below, even if the emphasis is somewhat presumptuous. Incidentally, the demiurge in the *Timaeus* (38d) is not subject to this same law proscribing contrary motion when he fashions Venus and Mercury.

<sup>73</sup> Skemp, *Statesman*, 146 n. 1.

this response, Campbell remarks: “The Stranger has indeed spoken with an appearance of artless simplicity well calculated to impose on the imagination of youth.”<sup>74</sup> This is consistent with the Stranger’s preface to the myth where he insists that Young Socrates listen “as children do” (*Pol.* 268d). But perhaps, as McCabe argues, there is a “methodology of simplicity” at work.<sup>75</sup> McCabe holds that the Stranger appeals to the simplest explanation. This is never said explicitly in the text, *pace* McCabe, but that should not deter us from thinking that something like parsimony is tacitly assumed by the Stranger as a guiding principle in his account.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, such a reading fits nicely with the digression later given on excess and deficiency (*Pol.* 283b-285d). Read in this way, however, the account still lacks an explanation for the reversal. Keeping in mind that it is a myth, the account the Stranger gives is not logically grounded, despite it seeming to be. The account has elaborately dismissed a divine cause for the reverse cosmic motion—and with it, perhaps, Empedocles and Zoroastrianism—but it has failed to address the cause of this motion. Thus, alongside Campbell, I think the Stranger successfully averts the flaws in this cosmological account by aptly banking on the gullibility of Young Socrates. And by doing so, the Stranger lays the metaphysical ground for the fascinating description of the Age of Cronus that follows.

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<sup>74</sup> Campbell, *Sophistes and Politicus*, 50 fn. 1.

<sup>75</sup> McCabe, “Chaos and Control,” 100.

<sup>76</sup> Doubtless, McCabe is referring to the point made by the Stranger about the retrogradation having the “smallest possible variation of its movement (ἵτι μικροτάτην τῆς ἀποκινήσεως παράλλαξιν)” (*Pol.* 269e). However, this passage points to the extent of παράλλαξις, and it would be a stretch to say that this (even tacitly) relates to simplicity.

The first thing the Stranger describes, having persuaded Young Socrates that the reversal of the cosmos is a sort of logical conclusion, is the catastrophe that unfolds during the time when this reversal takes place. We are to imagine a time well before the present era when the universe moved as it does now—that is, with the sun rising in the east and setting in the west. Having run its course, and the Stranger tells us that this involves “tens of thousands of revolutions” (*Pol.* 270a), Cronus steers the universe in the opposite direction. As a result of this act, “the greatest and most complete turning of all” (*Pol.* 270c), the living beings on earth at this time are for the most part destroyed. The Stranger describes this catastrophic period as a time when humans survive “only in small numbers” (*Pol.* 270d). The explanation given is that “living creatures by their nature (φύσις) have difficulty (χαλεπός) in tolerating (□νέχω) changes that are at once large, great in number, and of all different sorts” (*Pol.* 270c). The Stranger attests to this fact with the rhetorical “□ρ□ ο□κ □σμεν” as though such a consequence is well understood. Perhaps the point is merely biological: that living creatures do not adjust well to catastrophic changes of the sort described *as we all know*. However, given the political context that later emerges, the passage can be interpreted to reflect constitutional change as well. Statesmen are described as those with the ability to steer (διακυβερνάω) the state toward happiness by issuing legislation that will guide the state in their absence (*Pol.* 301d). Without such laws, the Stranger warns toward the end of the dialogue, states risk collapsing into chaos: they “sink like ships...through the depravity of their steersman and sailors” (*Pol.* 302a). Likewise in the myth, Cronus is a helmsman (κυβερνήτης) who intervenes in worldly matters out of concern that the universe “should not, storm-tossed as it is, be broken apart in confusion and sink into the boundless sea of unlikeness” (*Pol.*



273d). Such interventions, whether political or cosmological, inevitably include changes that are difficult to bear. In the *Laws*, correspondingly, the ideal starting point for constitutional change is “a state under the absolute control of a dictator (τύραννος)” (*Laws* 709e) because that is the “quickest and easiest” way to transform (μεταβάλλω) a state (*Laws* 710d). Similarly, upon taking charge of the cosmic direction, Cronus seizes absolute control to oversee every aspect to the lives of the surviving animals and humans under his dominion.

As one might expect, the lives of these survivors are made much easier under Cronus’ rule, absolute though it may be. The Stranger describes the Age of Cronus as a time without “war or internal dissent (στάσις),” nor even poleis or families (271e-272a).<sup>77</sup> During this time, humans and animals are provided for in every way. Scarcity is eliminated, with edible vegetation springing abundantly from the uncultivated land, rendering farming an unnecessary pursuit. Moreover, humans abstain from eating meat. Indeed no animal consumes any other, because they (i.e., the formerly predatory species) are no longer savage (□γριος) (271e).<sup>78</sup> Still more surprising, clothes and bedding are

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<sup>77</sup> See n. 90, below.

<sup>78</sup> Vegetarianism is similarly linked to primitivism in both the *Republic* and the *Laws*. In *Laws* VI, the Athenian describes the evolution of religious practices, remarking that animal sacrifice is an innovation because, in the past, people lived a pure “Orphic” life that strictly prohibited killing animals (*Laws* 782cd). The *Republic* makes this connection as well. Commentators rarely mention the vegetarianism in Socrates’ first just city, the City of Pigs (*Rep.* 372cd). Bernadete (*Socrates’ Second Sailing*, 51) is one of the few scholars who discusses it, speculating that it is an allusion to Pythagoreanism and drawing a somewhat tenuous connection between eating meat and the need for tables to raise the meat from the ground (tables being one of the things Glaucon will not go without). It is only in the Luxurious City that meat is needed—and in particular “cooks and swineherds” (*Rep.* 273c)—in all likelihood because it is a necessary component to the diet of soldiers. The Spartan diet, according to legend, consisted almost entirely of meat. In the ancient mind, meat and strife are conceptually related. Hence, in the *Statesman* myth we might say that animals stop eating each other because στάσις is eliminated (*Pol.* 271e). Cf., however, *Laws* III where

dispensed with. The seasons are blended together, offering a kind of providentially orchestrated climate control. And the ubiquitous grasses are soft to the touch, providing a comfortable resting place for the naked Cronians.

Whereas this description will doubtless recall any number of ancient and cross-cultural stories of a utopian Golden Age, the myth in the *Statesman* includes one particularly remarkable detail: in the Age of Cronus, all creatures youthen. During the course of their lives, living beings progress from visible maturity toward adolescence. As time goes on they appear increasingly younger. They lose their pubescent features and become like newborns, and ultimately they simply disappear (ἀφανίζω) (*Pol.* 270e). The eloquent description the Stranger provides to illustrate the course of a human life is worth repeating:

The white hairs (λευκά τριχες) of the older men became black, and in turn the cheeks of those who had their beards became smooth again, returning each to his past bloom; the bodies of those in their puberty, becoming smoother and smaller each day and night, went back to the form of new-born children, which they came to resemble both in mind and in body (*Pol.* 270e, Rowe's translation).

To my knowledge, no commentator has yet offered a convincing explanation for this aspect of the myth. It is often thought of as a reference to Hesiod, owing to the description of men from the Iron Age as eventually born with grey hairs (*Works and*

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a similarly catastrophic decimation of the population results in political primitivism that, this time, provides an abundance of meat and hunting (*Laws* 679a).

*Days*, 181).<sup>79</sup> This interpretation is weak in my opinion, however. Hesiod's adjective is πολιοκρόταφος with the suggestion that in the chaotic final days of the Iron Age, children are born already *beginning* to grey. And these children further deteriorate as time moves forward. Plato's adjective is λευκός, suggesting hair that is *already* colorless, after which it blackens (μελαίνω). Moreover, Hesiod's description is peculiar to the Iron Age (i.e., our age), and Hesiod never mentions cosmic reversal. This is not to say that there are no Hesiodic elements to the myth in the *Statesman*. The Age of Cronus itself is arguably an allusion to Hesiod's Golden Age at least insofar as Hesiod also attributes this era of abundance to the sovereignty of Cronus (*Works and Days*, 111).<sup>80</sup> But I can see no good reason for connecting the grey-haired children of the Iron Age to the youthening of the Cronians in the *Statesman*. This point will be further developed below where I argue that the myth is more Euripidean than Hesiodic and that one of its functions is to amalgamate several stories into a single unifying account. The fact remains, however, that a comprehensive explanation for this aspect of the myth is missing in the literature. Even were it an allusion to the brief remark in *Works and Days*, this would not suffice to explain its role in the *Statesman*.

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<sup>79</sup> This interpretation is best defended by El Murr, "Hesiod." But, it is also an interpretation central to Solmsen, "Hesiodic Motifs" and Rowe, "Grey-haired Babies," and it is noted by Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, 94, Kahn, "Myth," 150, and Yamagata, "Hesiod in Plato," 84f, among others. In fact, the interpretation has remained unchallenged as far as I know.

<sup>80</sup> Still, at *Pol.* 269ab when the Stranger asks Young Socrates about the Reign of Cronus, the latter points out that this is a story told by "a great many." Hesiod is never mentioned by name in the myth, and the actual evidence provided by scholars for Hesiodic motifs in the myth is scant (see above n. 16). Cf. in the *Cratylus* (297e)—and, of course, *passim* throughout the corpus—where Hesiod is cited directly. In the *Cratylus*, we might add to further the contrast with the *Statesman*, the Cronians are said to be wise, good, and divine, much like those living in Hesiod's Golden Age.

Only Horn's 2012 paper, entitled "Why Two Epochs of Human History," has attempted to provide some insight on the matter. Horn argues that there are three implications to the reversal in age experienced by the Cronians.<sup>81</sup> First, one's time of death (i.e., disappearance) is foreseeable in the Age of Cronus since no living creature is threatened by violence or illness. Second, human life (and presumably all life) in the Age of Cronus is asexual—humans are literally born of the earth (*Pol.* 271a)—suggesting to Horn that life is free from the violent passions that prove so troublesome in the Age of Zeus. From these two implications follows a third, argues Horn: a divinely paternalistic protector who has the ability to plan and direct the affairs of the Cronians because their lives follow a rational and foreseeable path. This third implication highlights the corresponding function of statesmen—viz., to plan and organize rules in a rational and determinable manner. This is intended as a sharp contrast to the Age of Zeus where such rules are too general to apply to particular cases and where the outcome is always uncertain. Horn's interpretation of this feature of the myth is intended to support a more general claim he makes about the *Statesman*—that it is fundamentally conservative: "The only guarantee for a reasonably appropriate political orientation [for us, living in the precarious Age of Zeus] is a strong sense of tradition."<sup>82</sup> As I argue in Chapter 4, however, there is far more nuance to the political dimensions of the dialogue. Furthermore, I think there are good reasons to doubt the implications Horn presents, regardless of the political message he finds them to support. For instance, Horn's specific

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<sup>81</sup> Horn, "Why Two Epochs," 415-417.

<sup>82</sup> Horn, "Why Two Epochs," 416.

claim is that one's *own* death is foreseeable in the Age of Cronus—that death for Cronians “is foreseeable to *them*.”<sup>83</sup> This firstly ignores the point made by the Stranger that, come the end of their lives, humans resemble children both physically and cognitively (*Pol.* 270e). Thus, upon reaching pre-pubescence a Cronian might be privileged with some vague and puerile idea of how much time remains, but as that time approaches so too will an increasingly infantile perspective on both time and death. One's death in the Age of Cronus, in other words, is no more foreseeable than one's birth is memorable in the Age of Zeus. And secondly, what should it matter whether death is foreseeable? Horn's answer is that life will be peaceful and unproblematic when it proceeds in this way, especially because it is free from fervid passions (his second implication). Yet, life in the Age of Cronus is already peaceful and unproblematic. His second and third implications, while they indeed draw out pertinent characteristics to the Age of Cronus, are not implications that relate to the reversal in aging *per se*. That said, a revision to Horn's first implication might help to shed at least some light on this feature of the myth—a feature that, excepting Horn, appears to be the third rail of scholarship on the myth in the *Statesman*. We should recall that in the myth at the end of the *Gorgias*, Zeus has Prometheus deny those facing judgment any foreknowledge of their death (*Gorg.* 523d), the point being that were they to have that knowledge—as they did during Cronus' time (*Gorg.* 523a)—they would be unfairly judged. It is explicitly said in the *Gorgias* myth that those living in Cronus' time were judged badly (*Gorg.* 523b), and a parallel exists in this respect to the myth in the *Statesman*. At *Pol.* 272b, the Stranger asks

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<sup>83</sup> Horn, “Why Two Epochs,” 415 (emphasis mine).

Young Socrates to judge the lives of those living in the Age of Cronus. When the latter cannot, the Stranger offers his criterion: if they studied philosophy and made good use of their time, then the lives of those living in the Age of Cronus would be far superior to those in the Age of Zeus. Preferring to leave the matter to someone more qualified, the Stranger does not offer his own judgment (*Pol.* 252d). If Horn's position is taken seriously, then an peaceful and unproblematic life with a foreseeable end in the Age of Cronus is just the sort of thing that can lead one to a misjudgment concerning whether it is happy (εὐδαίμων) (*Pol.* 272b) or just and holy (δίκαιως καὶ ἁγίως) (*Gorg.* 523ab). The point can be made more general if we combine it with the discussion above concerning the Stranger's pretension to a logical explanation for the cosmic reversal. That is to say, the reversal in the apparent age of Cronians is one of several features to the myth designed to provoke Young Socrates' gullible intrigue at the cost of his rational judgment.

None of what has been argued thus far should be taken to suggest that the Stranger is duplicitous or that there is nothing serious in the myth. Rather, the myth accomplishes precisely what the Stranger promises it will: it approaches the inquiry into statesmanship by traveling down a new road, proceeding from another point (ἄτερον ἄδιν πορευθῆναι τινα); and this new approach involves mixing in childish play (σχεδὸν παιδὶν ἁγκερασμένους) (*Pol.* 268d).

### 3.2 The Preamble

The starting point for this new road is a preamble the Stranger introduces before recounting the myth (*Pol.* 268e-269c). As Vidal-Naquet rightly observes, the preamble “appears to have been curiously neglected by commentators.”<sup>84</sup> It is, I believe, worth discussing briefly in order to determine how the myth functions with respect to the dialogue as a whole. The preamble comprises three distinct stories. The first is the rivalry between Atreus and Thysetes, the two mythological sons of Pelops. The Stranger is oddly authoritative when he introduces the story:

There have occurred in the past, and will occur in the future, many (πολύς) of the things that have been told through the ages; one is the portent relating to the quarrel between Atreus and Thyestes. I imagine you remember hearing what people say happened then. (*Pol.* 268e)

The story that is referred to provides the background for Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* and would have been well known to someone like Young Socrates (see *Crat.* 395a). In a savage act of defiance, the hero Tantalus—grandfather to Atreus and Thyestes—killed and dismembered his son Pelops, boiling the latter’s flesh and serving it as a sacrifice to the gods. Tantalus was punished for the offence, forever “tantalized” by food and drink that he cannot reach. Pelops’ life was restored, and he later fathered the two brothers to whom the Stranger refers. But the savagery that characterized Tantalus would come to be inherited by his descendants. In vying for the throne, Thyestes seduces his brother’s wife and steals a golden sheep that symbolizes the right to rule Mycenae. In retaliation, Atreus invites Thysetes to dinner on the pretext of fraternal reconciliation. Midway through, however, Atreus produces the severed limbs from Thyestes’ own sons in a horrifying

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<sup>84</sup> Vidal-Naquet, “Plato’s Myth,” 136.

revelation of the meal's contents. What follows is a *deus ex machina*: the reversal of the direction of the cosmos. It is this particular event to which the Stranger is referring as "happening then" (*Pol.* 268e).

The details I have provided are left out of the preamble, but I believe they are important for understanding the myth. Adopting a contrary position, Vidal-Naquet claims that the "use of *this* legend is a bit strange," and argues that a different account—the account given by Herodotus of cosmic reversal—was not only known to Plato (citing the *Timaeus*), but would have been a preferable story for the Stranger to use.<sup>85</sup> And Vidal-Naquet is right that the cosmic reversal noted in Herodotus' *Histories* reinforces a further claim depicting a cyclical political order insofar as it describes a time during which rulers were gods, followed by a period where humans rule themselves.<sup>86</sup> To defend Plato against this accusation, however, we should note that Herodotus' account is arguably inconsistent with the Stranger's. Herodotus writes that "four times in this period [i.e., the period during which mortals ruled Egypt] (so they told me) the sun rose contrary to experience; twice he came up where he now goes down, and twice went down where he now comes up" (*Hist.* 2.142.4). Not only do these four reversals occur within too short a period for them to be fitted to the two eras in the *Statesman* myth, they also happen during a time when Egypt "had no king who was a god in human form" (*Hist.* 2.142.3). Moreover, immediately following the description of the cosmic reversals, Herodotus adds "Egypt at these times underwent no change, either in the produce of the river and the

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<sup>85</sup> Vidal-Naquet, "Plato's Myth," 136.

<sup>86</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 2.144: "Before these men [i.e., the admirable rulers from the past honored with statues], they said, the rulers of Egypt were gods...." (Godley's translation)



land, or in matters of sickness and death” (*Hist.* 2.142.4). This contrasts sharply with the catastrophic destruction depicted in the *Statesman* as taking place at such times. Of course, Plato might well have altered the myth in the *Statesman* to render it consistent with Herodotus, Vidal-Naquet might reply. However, there are additional reasons that justify the Atreus story here. Essentially, the story of Atreus and Thyestes concerns the right to govern—a theme that is predominant in the *Statesman*. Furthermore, Atreus and Thyestes represent a congenital lack of reverence for the gods, and they might be said to symbolize exactly the kind of internal dissent (στάσις) that indicates the need for divine intervention in the *Statesman*. And whereas the context for this story is implicit in Aeschylus’ *Orestia*, the reference to the reversal of the cosmos is from Euripides’ *Electra*, with the chorus singing of when “Zeus changed the radiant paths of the stars, and the light of the sun, and...that the sun turned round his glowing throne of gold, changing it to the misfortune of mankind.”<sup>87</sup> This passage makes it clear that the change in the direction of the stars and sun also signals the subsequent tribulation of humanity.<sup>88</sup>

The second story in the preamble is the relatively brief mention of the Reign of Cronus. The Stranger notes that they have “heard from many (πολύς) about the kingship exercised by Cronus” (*Pol.* 269a). Despite the fact that the Stranger explicitly points out that *many* have told of this event, it is with this passage that we find scholars connecting

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<sup>87</sup> Euripides, *Electra*, 728-742 (Coleridge’s translation). See also *Ins.* 1000-1010: “Strife changed the course of the sun’s winged chariot, fitting the westward path of the sky towards the single horse of Dawn; and Zeus diverted the career of the seven Pleiads into a new track and exchanged . . . death for death.” To my knowledge, *Electra* provides the only two extant references to the reversal of the cosmos in the myth of Atreus and Thyestes prior to Plato.

<sup>88</sup> Note that in Herodotus, no mention is made of a change in the direction of the stars. Only the sun changes its course.

Plato with Hesiod. Doubtless Hesiod provides the earliest version of this account, yet the Reign of Cronus is a pervasive narrative in extant texts.<sup>89</sup> And as I have argued above, nothing in Hesiod's *Works and Days* suggests the curious rejuvenation experienced by the Cronians in the story subsequently told by the Stranger. What I suspect is at work here is an attempt by the Stranger to amalgamate a number of mythological accounts from the past into a single narrative. Hence, the Stranger claims that "all these things [i.e. mythic events] together are consequences of the same state of affairs" (*Pol.* 269b). The myth in the *Statesman* is itself an example of stories woven together from seemingly disparate elements. The introduction of the myth is explained in just this way, as an abrupt digression from the dialectical pursuit of the statesman by "mixing in...an element of play" (*Pol.* 268d). The political essence of statesmen, we learn as the dialogue moves forward, is to arrange the various political arts that constitute a city so as to bring about a harmonious social fabric—as a prophylactic against στάσις, as it were. It is precisely the ability to amalgamate that characterizes a statesman. Moreover, the dialogue in general is a combination of myth, method, and politics. And the extended digression on weaving reinforces this theme of unification. It is with this in mind that we should approach the final story mentioned in the preamble: the oft-told report of an earth-born race.

When the Stranger concludes the preamble with a stated intent to combine the story he is about to tell with "the report that earlier men were born from the earth and were not reproduced from each other" (*Pol.* 269b), we should consider that whatever

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<sup>89</sup> See El Murr, "Hesiod" 283-289 for detailed, though surely not exhaustive, list of examples in Old Comedy.

Young Socrates might perceive as gaps in the logic of the myth will be bridged by the reports he knows have been told (as he admits) “through the ages” (*Pol.* 269b). It is fitting that the youthening of the Cronians proceeds as a consequence of their autochthonous “birth” out of the earth, since the retrogradation of the cosmos is a rejuvenating movement for the whole as well as for its parts. The universe, insofar as it contains body, cannot move forever in the same direction (*Pol.* 269e). It is only with the help of the divine helmsman that it can again be revitalized, “acquiring life once more and receiving a restored immortality from its craftsman” (*Pol.* 270a). The parts of this universal whole are similarly perishable, and once living creatures die in the Age of Zeus, their souls are in need of the same restoration as the universe. Thus, as the Stranger explains, “we must reflect (συννοέω) on what is implied (ἵκτεῖται) by what we have said. If old men went back to being children, it follows (ἵπεται) that people should be put together again from the dead, there in the earth, and come back to life” (*Pol.* 271b). And this is said to follow out of “necessity (ἵναγκάζω)” from the “argument (λόγος)” (*Pol.* 271c). The diction in these passages strongly suggests a logical connection between autochthony, youthening, and the cosmic reversal. Whether there is such a connection is another matter. Nevertheless, this is further evidence in support of Campbell’s suspicion that the rhetorical force and the superficial logic of the myth is designed to suppress Young Socrates’ rational assessment of it. Of course, autochthony was a popular idea in Classical Greece, even if, as the Stranger claims, it is “wrongly disbelieved by many people” (*Pol.* 271b).<sup>90</sup> Athenians in particular believed they were descended from an

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<sup>90</sup> Perhaps even serving to reinforce patriarchy. Leitaos argues in *Pregnant Male as Myth*, 83 n. 71, that

earth-born race.<sup>91</sup> In fact, autochthony is primarily a political concept, as Segal explains, and was often used to explain how a just king inherits power from an unjust predecessor.<sup>92</sup> Segal argues that the Ouranos-Cronus-Zeus succession is but one example of this motif. If Segal is correct, our attention should again be directed to Euripides, and this time to the *Bacchae*: “O Stranger [viz., Dionysus], do you not reverence the gods and Kadmos who sowed the earth-born crop?”<sup>93</sup> This is a reference to Cadmus’ Σπαρτοί, the earth-born ancestors of Thebes, from another myth that once again concerns reverence to the gods and the right to rule amidst intra-familial στάσις, where social order is finally restored only after the intervention of the gods.

Considering what has been said thus far, we would do well to resist the standard Hesiodic interpretation of the myth. As I have argued, the myth points more to Euripides than Hesiod, and fundamentally it is an amalgamation of several “ancient reports (πάλαι λεχθέντα)” (*Pol.* 274c) woven together with political undertones pertaining to the distinction between divine and secular governance. In fact, it is this juxtaposition of the

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autochthony “writes women out of the process of reproduction.” Indeed, we might wonder whether women exist in the Age of Cronus, as Vidal-Naquet does in claiming that in the myth, “only male humans are born from the earth” (“Plato’s Myth,” 137). I can find nothing in the text to confirm this, however, unless the suggestion is from *Pol.* 271b4 where it is said that the aged (πρεσβύτης) return to the state of a child (παῖς) and that the respective masculine articles τοῦς and τοῖς agreeing with these nouns restrict the πρεσβύτης to males exclusively. Yet, this would ignore the language at *Pol.* 270d, when a reversal is said to apply to “the visible age of each and every creature (ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ κτίσει).”

<sup>91</sup> See Dougherty (“Interpreting Myth,” 158) for evidence of the popularity of this opinion, *pace* the Eleatic Stranger.

<sup>92</sup> Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics*, 139.

<sup>93</sup> Euripides, *Bacchae*, 263-264 (trans. Buckley). For other passages, see lns. 1024f and 1314.

divine and the secular that the Stranger eventually proclaims was the reason for relaying the myth in the first place (*Pol.* 274e-275a). In their hunt for a definition of the statesman, Young Socrates and the Stranger have mistakenly produced an account stipulating a necessarily divine ruler who can provide for all the needs of the people, as a shepherd provides for a flock—or, as Cronus does for all beings under his dominion. And whereas the myth is apparently intended to expose this error, it is not until we see the complexities in the various details of the myth that it becomes clear how much of an understatement this really is. Having now developed a richer understanding of some of these details, we can more easily recognize how they fit together. The myth, insofar as it is a myth, succeeds in captivating Young Socrates by combining a number of accounts he admits he has heard reported—accepted on the basis of authority, that is, rather than upon rational reflection. And the three stories that preface the myth not only bind together the details of the myth, they also serve to establish the political themes underlying the myth—especially in demarcating a divinely governed utopian Golden Age from the increasingly precarious and destructive nature of secular rule.

### 3.3 Practicality and the Myth

In developing the account of statesmanship prior to the presentation of the myth, the Stranger and Young Socrates repeatedly divide increasingly specific arts until they arrive at what appears to be a satisfactory definition of statesmanship—basically, that statesmanship is the art of rearing (τρέφω) the human herd (*Pol.* 268c). Though Young Socrates expresses his contentment with the account and considers the investigation over, the Stranger warns that, given this definition, many contenders will claim to share the role of rearing humans. Millers, bakers, merchants, and doctors each practice an art that

might be said to contribute to human rearing. Thus, the account is incomplete. It is at this point that the myth is introduced.

The myth is placed between what I have argued above, in 2.2, is a move from one stage in a series of divisions to another. In the first stage, Young Socrates and the Stranger have made exclusively dichotomous cuts. They begin with an abstract concept, knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), noting that statesmen are in possession of a form of knowledge. The process that follows is one that delineates knowledge in an orderly manner into specific spheres that are respectively governed by some particular art. Thus, statesmanship is the theoretical and directive kind of knowledge that pertains to the art of rearing living creatures who are two-footed and hornless and so on, until it the particular thing—viz., human—is identified as the object. Insofar as humans are the object of some productive art, they are a final product, much like clothes in the weaving example that follows. And the first stage to the method of division involves locating that product by distinguishing it from other products, saying nothing about the process involved in its production or any contributing arts in that process. If it were the case that only a single art is required for the production of humans—as is the case in the Age of Cronus, where production takes place under divine guidance and humans are herded like animals<sup>94</sup>—then Young Socrates would be correct in saying that they have succeeded in defining the statesman. Instead, we are treated to a number of digressions designed to both illuminate the deficiencies in the account and pave the way for a new approach to the inquiry.

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<sup>94</sup> See El Murr, “Hesiod,” 290, who notes that Cronian humans are like animals. Cf., Rosen, *Plato’s Statesman*, 53, for the suggestion that humans in the Age of Cronus are “plant-like.”

Subsequently, the dialogue is structured as follows: the myth is introduced and justified with the Stranger's observation that their definition failed to specify the manner by which statesmen rule (the "lesser error") and, worse, failed to identify a statesman from the present era, the Age of Zeus (the "greater error"). Then, the weaving example is provided (see 2.2.1, above). The account of statesmanship is completed only with non-dichotomous divisions that specify and demarcate the various contributing arts and competitors related to the *practice* of statesmanship. Practical concerns related to governance—concerns that exist only in the Age of Zeus—are discussed only after the myth distinguishes our era from an era where civic arts and practicality are unnecessary. The first era in the myth thus corresponds to the first stage in the account of statesmanship.

The second stage in the account of statesmanship begins with a non-dichotomous cut (a "limb-by-limb" division: *Pol.* 287c) that distinguishes the various productive civic arts that exist in a polis. Citizens living in poleis require vessels, vehicles, tools, nourishment, etc., and each art contributes in some way to the needs of the polis. Not only is statesmanship distinct from these productive activities, it is also distinct from the political arts that cooperate with it—viz., generalship, judgeship, and oratory. Ultimately, statesmanship is revealed as the art that supervenes over all of these arts, managing the productive civic arts and issuing directions to the cooperative political arts. As a form of knowledge, statesmanship stands apart from these subordinate arts in much the same way that the divine helmsman stands in relation to the cosmos. Statesmen, when they are actually governing, legislate rules that are designed to bring harmony to the polis. And they can directly intervene in particular matters for which the law is too general. When

they are not governing, on the other hand, the laws act as a second-best substitute, providing a general guideline to follow in their absence similar to the reverse motion of the cosmos when the divine helmsman releases control. Yet, the absent statesman is three degrees removed from the ideal of governance as it is described in the myth during the Age of Cronus. Ideally, statesmanship could provide for all human needs. This, however, would require the absence of scarcity and the abolishment of the polis and family. It would require, in other words, a divine governor. An idealized method of division can likewise offer an account of such a statesman if it ignores practicality. Ideally, a series of dichotomous cuts will cleanly define statesmen as the sole rearers of the human flock, but a less-than-ideal method of division is necessary given the complexities of social life in a world where humanity must be organized into domestic and political arrangements.

It is worth emphasizing that during the first era in the myth everything is already provided; there is no production in the Age of Cronus and, as a result, no arts are needed. The inhabitants of the earth under the guidance of Cronus are described as the *τρόφιμοι*—the “nurslings” of Cronus, from the adjective *τρόφιμος*, indicating a race that is well-nourished and healthy (*Pol.* 272b). And the idyllic environment is abundant not only in food but also in leisure (*σχολή*) (*Pol.* 272b). The absence of *στάσις* coupled with moderate weather and abundant natural habitat all proceed from the divine guidance of the rotation of the universe. Because the whole is properly ordered, so too are the parts. Cronians do not need to have expertise in any productive art, though this might play a role in depriving them of happiness since they are likely to gorge themselves and squander their abundant leisure time rather than seek wisdom with it (*Pol.* 272cd). Yet, wisdom is not a practical matter. Practicality is not a concern in the Age of Cronus.



Human life is on par with the lives of domesticated animals, and the causes responsible for perpetuating this condition are divine. This is perhaps why Neoplatonist authors suggested that Cronus symbolizes unadulterated *νομή*, whereas Zeus represents “the forms in their multiplicity and greater particularity.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed, the harmony of the whole and the parts under the sovereignty of Cronus is the result of a divine ordering. The parts of the whole are properly constituted, and the divisions “by kind and by herd” are made by divine spirits who act as herdsmen “providing independently for all the needs” of each kind (*Pol.* 271e). The “kinds” here are independent and divinely separated, corresponding to the method of division employed at the first stage in the account. Given the nature of divisions made in the Age of Cronus, the rules can be followed: divisions are made “through the middle of things” and they “encounter real classes” (*Pol.* 262b) just because these classes are divinely ordered and exist independently of one another. A different situation emerges in the Age of Zeus, where practicality demands that hierarchies are established to manage the relations between the various parts that exist. These parts exist in a relation of dependence with respect to one another—with each part contributing in some way to the production or maintenance of the whole, rather than the whole being responsible for its parts.

Life is messier in the Age of Zeus. In this era, production (and reproduction) is essential to human survival. That is why the first generation in the Age of Zeus “did not yet know how to provide for themselves, having had no shortage to force them to do so

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<sup>95</sup> Dillon, “Neoplatonic Exegesis,” 367. Dillon cites evidence in Proclus and Plotinus for this connection, going so far as to suggest that Cronus and Zeus “represent rather two permanent levels of reality” in Neoplatonic thought.

before” (*Pol.* 274c). The arts are disseminated to humanity in the Age of Zeus as “gifts from the gods” because, as the Stranger tells us, survival depends on the “indispensable requirement for teaching and education: fire from Prometheus, crafts from Hephaestus and his fellow craftworker, seeds and plants from others” (*Pol.* 272cd). Such a situation requires cooperation and political organization, two features that are absent in the Age of Cronus. In the Age of Zeus, working together and living in a structured environment is a convention that is possible only because of the political arts. It is a consequence of living in a world that is unstable and threatening. As Castoriadis notes, “the world of the time of Zeus becomes more and more disordered, therefore more and more heterogenous, therefore less and less thinkable; and it thereby participates less and less in being.”<sup>96</sup> It is in this way that the Age of Zeus corresponds to the second stage in the account of statesmanship. The first stage succeeds in locating the object of the definition on the presumption that the type of knowledge that is being investigated is itself sufficient for the production of that object. The second stage, by contrast, must take into account features that pertain to the realities of a world of becoming, a world that is itself disordered and heterogenous. The first stage in the account involves locating the object as though it existed in the intelligible realm. Such objects are not subject to the limitations of practicality and they are clearly distinguished from one another. It is only at the second stage, when an account is provided to explain the process by which this product comes into being, that certain practical constraints must be taken into consideration and for which several productive arts must work together. Genuine statesmen in the Age of Zeus

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<sup>96</sup> Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, 112.

resemble others who have a similar knowledge, and the method by which true statesmen can be identified involves removing their competitors and establishing a hierarchy to the contributory and cooperative arts that fall under the purview of statesmanship. This is a messy process and one that requires a flexible non-dichotomous method to practically categorize all of the many civic arts that contribute to the care of humans.

Thus, in the first stage of the account, there is no overlap or competition among the cleanly segregated binary parts of the divisions, just as there is no competition among the Cronians for whom everything is provided. Moreover, there is no process of becoming for objects investigated at the first stage of the inquiry. They exist in the intelligible realm, emerging from the dialectical process, as it were, just as beings emerge from the earth in the Age of Cronus. In the second stage of the account, the competitors to the statesman—i.e., those who claim but do not possess statesmanship, such as sophists and rhetors, as we shall investigate in 4.2, below—threaten the political constitution itself, similar to the threat that exists to the lives of the first generation in the Age of Zeus as a result of their political and technical ignorance. A flexible method is needed to discriminate concrete objects existing in the world of becoming. Only at this second stage in the account can true statesmen be separated from political charlatans. And only with the flexibility accorded to the method can the complex parts of the state be organized for it to have any chance of surviving in the increasingly perilous Age of Zeus.

### 3.4 Imitation and the Myth

There is a silver lining to this otherwise pessimistic myth, however. The cosmos has its share of blessed (μακάριος) things (*Pol.* 269d), and among these is its innate desire (σύμφυτος  $\square$ πιθυμία: *Pol.* 272e) to imitate the divine. In its retrogradation, the universe

“remembers (ἀπομνημονεύω)” (*Pol.* 273b) its divinely guided motion and imitates it. And insofar as it imitates this motion well, “it manages everything quite well” (*Pol.* 273c). In this final section, I argue that there is a conspicuous connection between this aspect of the myth and the political theory expounded later in the dialogue.

The ostensible argument the Stranger gives to explain the reversal of the universe has been discussed above. As an intelligent and living being (*Pol.* 269d), the universe is fitted with an innate desire (*Pol.* 272e) to imitate the guided motion of its progenitor. With somewhat confounding logic, this attempt at imitation results in a reverse rotation “which is the smallest possible variation of its [divinely guided] movement” (*Pol.* 269e). With this reversal of the cosmic whole, its constitutive parts follow suit, “imitating (ἀπομιμέομαι) and following (συνακολουθέω) on the condition of the universe” (*Pol.* 274a). With the change in the direction of the whole, there are corresponding changes in the parts “which necessarily imitated (μίμημα συνείπετο) and kept pace with the change to everything” (*Pol.* 274a). The characteristics of the whole are thus directive and causally related to the characteristics of the parts owing to the presence of a blessedness and the desire to imitate the divine.

The positive political theory suggested late in the dialogue contains language that is similar to the account provided in the myth describing the rotation of the heavens during the Age of Zeus. The only genuine constitution is one in which sovereignty is located in rulers who truly possess the art of statesmanship. The others are “not really constitutions at all, but imitations (μιμέομαι) of this one” (*Pol.* 293e). Constitutions based

on the rule of law are said to be imitate it “for the better,” and those that are not imitate it “for the worse” (*Pol.* 293e).<sup>97</sup> Thus, every state imitates the statesman-run constitution. We can judge a political order based on how closely it resembles a genuine constitution, but every polis is imitative. The same point is repeated verbatim a few Stephanus pages later, at 297c, and when Young Socrates seeks clarification, the Stranger responds by elaborating on the distinction between a statesman-run constitution and one based on laws that originated from a statesman. The latter is a “second choice” (297e), and this prompts a digression intended to explain how this “second choice” came about. This digression will be explored in detail in 4.4 below, but basically the Stranger explains that we are limited to imitative constitutions because the art of statesmanship has degenerated to the point of ultimate destruction owing to the corrupting influence of increasingly democratic institutions designed to oversee and protect the laws. In other words, a constitution degenerates into a pale imitation of its original form despite a deliberate effort to imitate that form. Even so, the laws in an imitative constitution remain “imitations (μίμημα) of the truth (□λήθεια)” (*Pol.* 300c), and no one should dare to act contrary to them.

In the myth, the Stranger describes the universe in the Age of Zeus as well constituted or not depending on its ability to remember the “teaching of its craftsman” (*Pol.* 273b). Time and memory, however, play an inevitably destructive role: “during all

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<sup>97</sup> This is Rowe’s translation. Plato chooses the verb καλλιώνω to describe a state that is *made more beautiful* insofar as it better imitates a statesman-run constitution by adopting the rule of law (more about which will be said in 4.4, below). The other constitutions are described with the adjective α□συχρός. Straying further from the Greek is Skemp’s translation: “Those which we call law-abiding copy it fairly closely, but the rest are more or less shocking caricatures of it.”

the time closest to the moment of his [i.e., Cronus'] letting go, it manages everything very well, but as time (χρόνος) moves on and forgetfulness (λήθη) increases in it, the condition of its original disharmony also takes greater control of it" (*Pol.* 273cd). This effect cannot be avoided, despite the innate desire of the universe to abide by Cronus' teachings. The parallel to the political trajectory described above is unmistakable. In both cases, time corrupts the teachings that would otherwise ensure political and cosmological harmony, teachings that are ultimately forgotten in spite of an intrinsic attempt to abide by them through imitation. Indeed, the self-guidance of any constitution cannot be sustained for very long.<sup>98</sup> Both the universe as a whole and its constitutive elements are well managed when they are fortunate enough to benefit from temporal proximity to the Age of Cronus. Yet, the cosmic memory of its divinely guided motion is fickle, and the universe eventually spins out of control, "in danger of destroying both itself and the things in it" (*Pol.* 273d). Likewise, political constitutions imitate the instructions of the statesmen who founded them, and insofar as these instructions are closely adopted, the polis and its constitutive elements—i.e., the citizens—are well managed. Because only generalized instructions can be preserved in writing, however, and because even the institutions designed to preserve these instructions are subject to the corrupting influence of reforms, the state diverges from its original form. Over time, new laws are adopted and forgetfulness increases to the point where the polis has degenerated past the point of recovery. By that time, it will be guided by rulers "who have no understanding at all

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<sup>98</sup> This suggestion has led Horn, "Why Two Epochs," 416 to conclude that the political dimensions of the dialogue are decidedly conservative. Yet, Taylor, *Sophist and Statesman*, 209, is convinced that the suggestion is to restrict authority to a form of impersonal rule—in the sovereignty of law.

about what belongs to the art of statesmanship” (*Pol.* 302b). On this reading, the myth presents the cosmos as a synecdoche for political organization. Divine governance of the cosmos corresponds to a polis governed by genuine statesmanship. But these are a thing of the past—and something that will again obtain in the future. In the meantime, seeing as neither the cosmos nor any existing polis is currently governed in this way, the alternative that remains is imitation. The universe, insofar as it is living and intelligent, emulates its earlier movement automatically. Likewise, current political constitutions are necessarily imitations, and constitutions governed by law with a law-abiding citizenry are imitating the genuine form well.

### 3.5 Summary

Before explicating the way that the themes in the myth intersect with the method and the politics of the *Statesman*, I argued that some details about the Age of Cronus solicit misjudgments from Young Socrates and, by implication, the reader. In particular, the argument the Stranger gives to explain the reversal of the cosmos is stated in terms that suggest that this motion is a logical consequence, even though it is not. And the corresponding reversal to the visible age of the inhabitants during the Age of Cronus, coupled with the abundance of provisions there, lead to the belief that they are happy, even though they are not. All this reinforces the ease with which mistakes are made when it comes to recognizing legitimate rulers (that is, statesman) and their role. I also argued against a Hesiodic reading of the myth. Rather, the myth is an amalgamation of several stories, woven together to stress the distinction between divine and secular rule. The myth itself is an example of weaving parts together. To further the interpretation defended in Chapter 1, I argued that the Age of Cronus corresponds to the first stage of

the method, where parts are easily identified and evenly organized. The Age of Zeus corresponds to the second stage of the method. As in the myth, the second stage deviates from the ideal in adjusting to practical constraints, and the parts must be arranged hierarchically. Finally, I showed that the cosmos, as it is described in the myth, is an image of the political constitution described later. Without the personal and harmonious direction of a divine helmsman, the cosmos spins out of control, much like a city when political matters are decided without the personal rule of statesmanship. However, by imitating the helmsman, the cosmos steers itself (for better or worse)—just as the city does when it imitates the statesman in establishing the rule of law.



## Chapter 4

### 4 Politics

Without going so far as to claim that Plato was anti-democratic, it is fair to call him an ardent critic of the Athenian democracy in which he lived.<sup>99</sup> Still more, many of his criticisms are directed at the idea of democracy itself. Doubtless, democracy is explicitly targeted by the author of the *Seventh Letter* and by Socrates in the middle dialogues. Of the latter, and falling somewhere between aspersion and libel,<sup>100</sup> the *Republic* casts Socrates as a fierce opponent of democracy. In Book VIII, Socrates lambastes the democratic city as diseased with drunken madness where the leaders act like subjects and the subjects like leaders, ultimately succumbing to a pestilence that “makes its way into private households and in the end breeds anarchy even among the animals” (*Rep.* 562de). In the *Gorgias*, with comparable hyperbole, Socrates argues that leaders in a democracy are mere lackeys of the people, and suggests at one point that they are analogous to catamites (*Gorg.* 494e).<sup>101</sup> Yet, this sentiment is difficult to find in the speakers of the later dialogues. In the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger insists on a balance

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<sup>99</sup> Yet even some have resisted this. See, e.g., Euben, “Reading Democracy.”

<sup>100</sup> Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist*, 45ff, offers an especially compelling treatment of the historical Socrates as more reluctant friend than staunch foe of the Athenian democracy.

<sup>101</sup> It is difficult to overstate the insult Socrates levels against Callicles in calling him a catamite, but the political connotation is less overt. Both Gorgias and Polus succumb to Socrates’ elenchus out of shame. But Socrates is particularly hard-pressed to shame Callicles, who refuses to budge even when accused of defending the life of a curlew, a bird that eats and excretes simultaneously (*Gorg.* 494b). Socrates resorts to the vulgar accusation that, according to Callicles’ account, the happiest life is had by one who *opts* to be a catamite. The innuendo is political: for Socrates, rhetoric is only successful if the speaker panders to the audience; that is, oratory is merely a knack for gratifying the desires of the crowd (*Gorg.* 463e). What Gorgias proclaims is the greatest craft and one that confers power on anyone who possesses it in a democracy, Socrates reduces to a contemptible flair for satiating the desires of a jury or assembly.

between democracy and monarchy, claiming that “it is absolutely vital for a political system to combine them” for it to be properly constituted (*Laws* 693d, reiterating the point at 756e). Accordingly, the guardians of the laws in Magnesia are elected (*Laws* 752d), most officials are selected by ballot or lot, and the Scrutineers—who have “authority over the authorities” (*Laws* 945c)—are elected by the entire state (*Laws* 945e).<sup>102</sup> Thus, it is unsurprising to find most scholars attributing to Plato a measure of ambivalence on the question of democracy.<sup>103</sup> Others have psychologized the apparent inconsistencies in Plato’s political theory by suggesting that he became increasingly disillusioned and pessimistic in his later years.<sup>104</sup> The question of the general consistency of Plato’s political thought cannot be addressed here. Rather, a considerably more modest claim will be defended. I argue that there are important subtleties to the discussion of politics in the *Statesman* that are revealed in the way that the political theory intersects with the myth and the methodology in the dialogue. In describing these subtleties, however, I shall attempt to convey that Plato’s political thought is especially intricate and rewards careful reading in spite of any ambivalence or disillusionment Plato might have felt.

Section 4.1 provides an overview of the political theory put forth by the Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman*. The Stranger eschews conventional criteria for distinguishing

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<sup>102</sup> The much-discussed Nocturnal Council is not technically elected, but it mostly comprises elected officials (viz. priests and guardians) (*Laws* 951d). In any case, the Nocturnal Council is not sovereign and its political function has been exaggerated (see Morrow, “Plato’s Cretan City,” 510).

<sup>103</sup> See, for instance, Samaras, *Plato on Democracy* and Bobonich, *Plato’s Utopia Recast*.

<sup>104</sup> This is the thesis in Klosko, *Development*.

between constitutions based on the number of rulers and the manner or privilege by which they rule. Instead, a genuine constitution is simply one whose ruler possesses knowledge of statesmanship. All other constitutions are imitations of this one. In the true statesman-run constitution, statesmanship is supreme over the cooperative arts of generalship, judgeship, and oratory. The art of the statesman consists in the ability to direct these arts toward the improvement of the state. In addition, the statesman is tasked with balancing the virtues of the citizens, specifically courage and moderation. Because these virtues are hostile to each other—both in the soul of an individual and among groups tending in either direction—the statesman weaves together these virtues at an individual level, through true opinion, and at a social level, through marriage. Of particular interest here is the emphasis that is placed on the criterion of statesmanship for demarcating genuine from imitative constitutions. Because statesmanship is a rare art, it could only be acquired by a small subset of the citizenry, implying that genuine constitutions cannot be democratic. Nevertheless, a closer look at the text makes it apparent that searching for actual statesmen is something of a red herring in terms of practical politics. Statesmen are extinct, and we have no choice but to live in an imitative constitution.

The overview in Section 4.1 lays the groundwork for discussing the nuances in the theory. Taken by itself, the politics described in the *Statesman* leave the reader with more questions than answers. Chief among these is why they conduct the inquiry in the first place, if statesmanship has died out. Part of the answer to this question is found by treating the myth and the discussion of method as integral to the political philosophy in the dialogue.

Section 4.2 discusses the general ambiguities in the dialogue and their relevance to the political theory. The painstaking process of dividing *episteme* in such an elaborate manner and the numerous digressions purportedly germane to the investigation reflect the difficulty in recognizing a true statesman. In the *Sophist*, by contrast, the problem is just the opposite: sophists turn up frequently and in many different forms. Statesmen are difficult to find, and they are easily misidentified. The general difficulties in the text are designed to reinforce the ambitious and possibly futile challenge in accurately locating a genuine ruler.

Section 4.3 argues that, despite the ambiguities in the text, there are definite assertions made regarding statesmanship. Essentially, statesmen manage the parts of a whole, and this requires both the ability to recognize the parts and the ability to understand their relation to one another. Parallel with this two-fold ability is the Stranger's demonstration of the method of division. And the statesman weaving together the virtues resembles the rejuvenating power of Cronus upon reprising control over the motion of the cosmos.

In Section 4.4, the eradication of the arts is discussed. The importance of the Stranger's extended metaphor in describing the destruction of the arts of navigation and medicine has not been adequately appreciated. When commentators discuss this part of the *Statesman*, they are typically led to conclude that the statesman is an impossible ideal. Whereas I agree that the text precludes the return of statesmanship, I think this eclipses a crucial point about law and imitation. Just as the cosmos imitates the motion directed by Cronus, cities must imitate the rule by statesman. What imitation boils down to is the strict adherence to law. Much like the guidelines the Stranger gives to Young Socrates for

making divisions, the existing customs and laws in a city should be obeyed without exception in the absence of statesmanship. This provides some reason for treating the *Statesman* as defending the sovereignty of law. However, this interpretation must be tempered by the observation that the rule of law is an imitative second-best alternative to the (true) sovereignty of knowledge.

## 4.1 Political Theory in the *Statesman*

After the long digression during which the Stranger reports the myth and explains the two errors it was purportedly told to expose (see 3.1, above), Young Socrates and the Stranger are again interrupted on their hunt for the statesman by a number of short digressions. They discuss a theory of modeling (*Pol.* 277a), the notions of excess and deficiency (*Pol.* 283a), and the study of dialectics (285d). These digressions are explicitly related to the inquiry underway in the text, a kind of self-referential justification for all the painstaking divisions and lengthy digressions.<sup>105</sup> Among these digressions is the weaver analogy discussed in 2.2, above. It is with this model that they again find themselves on the path to the statesman. As with the division into weaving, what I have called the second stage (see 2.2.2, above) in the account of statesmanship begins with the division of contributory and direct causes. They are interested in classifying the causes of human caretaking by dividing the civic arts, hoping to uncover the art proper to human caretaking—viz., statesmanship. The contributory causes are the arts that produce the

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<sup>105</sup> As Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus*, 11, explains this was thought to suggest the loss of Plato's creative powers in his old age—and that the *Sophist* and *Statesman* were never intended for publication. Ryle, *Plato's Progress*, 28, argues that the Stranger's apparent insecurity over the length and style of the digressions betrays Plato's own insecurities about his mature writing.

tools in the city, such as (broadly) vehicles, nourishments, and defenses. After setting aside the contributory causes related to human caretaking, the Stranger proceeds to discuss the direct causes by dividing servants and subordinates from the class of governors.<sup>106</sup> In the former group, the Stranger places slaves, day laborers, heralds, and priests.<sup>107</sup> Also, the Stranger—as though experiencing a vision—reports that a “very large group of people has just become visible (κατάδηλος)” (*Pol.* 291a). This group turns out to be a chorus (χορός) for the “greatest magician (γόης) of all the sophists” (*Pol.* 291c). And it is at this point that the dialogue enters a long digression on constitutional forms.<sup>108</sup>

The digression appears to be motivated by a desire to distinguish this magician-sophist from the true statesman. Just before the digression, the Stranger stresses the difficulty that lies ahead in distinguishing the statesman from such a sophist (*Pol.* 291c). The digression begins with a conventional tally of constitutional forms: rule by one, few, and many. The point seems to be that the leaders in such constitutions are the magician-

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<sup>106</sup> The term “governors” is somewhat makeshift. I have borrowed it from Sayre, *MMPS*, 120, who cites *Pol.* 290b. The category of what Sayre calls “governors” will eventually be divided into generals, judges, orators, and statesmen. However, only the statesmen are truly governors; the others are subordinate to the statesman. And that is a crucial point (discussed in 4.2, below). Sayre wishes to capitalize on his reading of a neat division between the governors in imitative constitutions and those in a genuine constitution—a division he thinks is tacitly implied: see Sayre, *MMPS*, 122. The term ἄρχων at *Pol.* 290b is used only to emphasize that heralds and civil servants are subordinates and not themselves rulers. It is not a label applied to the class as a whole. I adopt the term only because the class is never clearly defined. As Sayre, *MMPS*, 127, correctly notes, all the right-hand divisions henceforth in the dialogue are “general and abstract.” Thus, “governors” suffices, provided that it is understood that they are themselves subordinate to the statesman.

<sup>107</sup> As Skemp, *Statesman*, 184 n. 2, observes it is worth remarking that slaves are not treated as mere tools, as they are, e.g., in Aristotle’s *Politics* I.3.

<sup>108</sup> Most commentators concede that what follows is a digression: see, esp. Miller, *Philosopher*, 86ff. Sayre, *MMPS*, 122, is an exception: see n. 106, above.

sophists and their chorus is the group who support and aid in their rule. Such leaders are sophists just because they do not have knowledge of statesmanship. They are great magicians insofar as they are able to appear as if they have expertise in ruling, despite being charlatans.

What makes this particularly interesting is that such leaders appear to fall within the class of servants and subordinates. Perhaps this is because they are subordinate to the laws. It is later explained that, with the exception of statesman-run constitutions, the best constitutions are those whose leaders act to preserve the existing laws (*Pol.* 293e) and where nothing is more powerful than the laws (*Pol.* 294a). Thus, in the best constitutions, the leaders are subordinates in the sense that they are subordinate to the law. But this explanation would not apply to leaders who simply disregard the law.

We might explore a more elaborate explanation by drawing on the *Republic*. In the Ship of State metaphor from Book VI, the shipowner is “stronger than everyone else on board” (*Rep.* 488a). The sailors crowd around the shipowner, each one vying to be captain, persuading him with drugs and wine (*Rep.* 488bc). The shipowner here represents the people, and in this sense, the leaders are always subject to the people.<sup>109</sup> Likewise, Books VIII and IX suggest that a similar servility characterizes the souls of the non-philosophical. However, we should recall that the guardians in the *Republic* are

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<sup>109</sup> That sovereignty is seemingly authorized by the people places Plato’s *Republic* alongside Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and against Machiavelli’s *Prince* and Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*.

themselves subject to the laws. Philosopher kings must be compelled by law to rule if they cannot be persuaded (*Rep.* 519e).<sup>110</sup>

Interestingly, some commentators have suggested that in the *Statesman*, the genuine ruler is implicitly stationed among the servants and subordinates.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, the Stranger does not label the class of “governors” from which the class of servants and subordinates is distinguished (see n. 106, above). Thus, it is plausible to think that the statesman too is a servant. However, such an interpretation depends on a rather convoluted interpretation of the divisions in the class of servants. If the statesman is among the servants and subordinates, then there must be a further division to that group to distinguish the imitators from those who truly have directive knowledge. Yet, such a division is never mentioned. Moreover, for consistency with the text, this latter group would have to be divided hierarchically such that the statesman controls the arts of generalship and judgeship, etc. In that case, the hierarchy would be exclusive to the group that gets separated from the sophistic chorus. But then the statesman could not be said to control the other members in the class of servants and subordinates. Nor would anyone else control these subordinate arts. In other words, by placing the statesman among the servants and subordinates, heralds for instance would be left without someone to direct their proclamations. It should be acknowledged that, whereas the Stranger lists the

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<sup>110</sup> See also *Rep.* 421b. The “laws” laid out in the *Republic* are repeatedly attributed to Glaucon, who serves as the legislator for Kallipolis (see, e.g., *Rep.* 458c). And so it is Glaucon’s laws that are guarded by the rulers, and in guarding them, the rulers stand to gain very little from their position (*Rep.* 420a). There is no suggestion anywhere, to the best of my knowledge, that the rulers can supersede the laws in the *Republic*—unlike the true statesman at *Pol.* 296a.

<sup>111</sup> This is the position developed by Dorter, *FGPED*, 221. A defense for this can also be found in Chiara-Quenzer, “Purpose,” 111. Both justifications depend on the idea that the statesman is a servant of the people.



members of this group as though he were dividing people, a closer reading confirms that we are still dividing arts (τέχνη at 290e7, πρῶξις at 289d1, and πίστιμη at 290c6).<sup>112</sup> It is the expertise and not the experts that get divided, even if the Stranger sometimes conflates the two in his description. Crucially, the arts listed among the servants and subordinates are precisely arts that are *necessarily* subordinate. In laborers, slaves, and heralds, this is obvious.<sup>113</sup> With priests, the point is perhaps less conspicuous. However, priests are in fact depicted as servants: they have “expert knowledge about the giving through sacrifices of gifts from us to the gods which are pleasing to them, and about asking from them through prayers for the acquisition of good things for us” (*Pol.* 290cd). Statesmen, generals, judges, and orators do not belong in this class of servants because their corresponding arts are not *necessarily* subordinate. It may be that they take orders from a superior, but in executing their respective arts they are issuing orders, not following them. Furthermore, on my reading, statesmanship is defined precisely as the art that can properly direct the “governing” arts of judgeship, generalship, and oratory.

However, the question remains why the charlatan leaders in other constitutions are apparently listed among the servants and subordinates. I submit that this is a misinterpretation of the text. The leaders of the sophistic chorus are not among the servants and subordinates, but only their chorus (read “cronies”). I develop this point below (see 4.2), but it suffices to add here that what follows on my reading is that arts

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<sup>112</sup> Whereas *praxis* is used rarely (e.g. in this case to describe statesmanship), *techne* and *episteme* are used interchangeably. However, *techne* is usually preferred for manual arts (e.g. in this case farming), and *episteme* for intellectual arts (e.g. in this case the art practiced by priests).

<sup>113</sup> Obvious, that is, provided that we agree with the Stranger that there are in fact arts that correspond to such groups. See Aristotle, *Politics*, I.13 for this perspective.

such as oratory are servile when paired with a charlatan leader, and different in nature when paired with a true statesman.

Among the more substantive points made in the digression on constitutional forms is the distinction drawn between the imitative forms and the one genuine constitution. The three archetypical forms are stated as rule by one, few, and many, and they are described by the Stranger as “giving birth (γίγνομαι)” (*Pol.* 291d) to two further forms, totaling five: monarchy and tyranny, aristocracy and oligarchy, and democracy. The criteria for distinguishing these names are force and consent, wealth and poverty, and law and lawlessness. Democracy is so-called regardless of “whether in fact it’s by force or with their consent that the mass rules over those who possess the wealth” (*Pol.* 292a).<sup>114</sup> However, the Stranger is careful to note that these criteria are merely what people refer to when they distinguish the various constitutional forms (*Pol.* 291e). In fact, these criteria do not supply the interlocutors with any means for determining which of these forms is correct. Because statesmanship is a kind of knowledge, the only criterion by which constitutions should be judged is by the presence or absence of statesmanship (*Pol.* 292c). Consequently, Young Socrates eventually agrees that the other criteria are irrelevant for evaluating the correctness of a constitution. The only genuine constitution is one where the ruler or rulers possess knowledge of statesmanship. In such a

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<sup>114</sup> The criterion of wealth is intriguing for defining democracy. Whereas it is typical now to think of the difference between oligarchy and democracy as a difference in number, both Plato and Aristotle are intent on applying an economic criterion. Aristotle, *Politics* III.8.1279b17, remarks that the difference in number is merely accidental. He adds that for any city ruled by the poor, he would persist in calling it democratic even if the wealthy were the majority. Advanced insights such as these lead superlative scholars such as Ste. Croix to prefer the political analysis of Aristotle over that of Plato: see esp. Ste. Croix, *CSAGW*, 69-71. However, the passage quoted above from the *Statesman* suggests that Plato’s analysis proceeds along similar lines.

constitution, it is irrelevant “whether they rule over willing or unwilling subjects, whether according to written laws or without them, and whether they rule as rich men or poor” (*Pol.* 293a).

One caveat is worth mentioning here. Young Socrates expresses uncharacteristic reluctance at the suggestion by the Stranger that a genuine constitution could be one without laws. Throughout the *Statesman*, Young Socrates almost invariably responds with curt answers of unqualified agreement. On the rare occasion when he attempts his own answer, he is almost always errs. But only once does Young Socrates express any reluctance to endorse the Stranger’s assertion:

The rest of it, visitor, seems to have been said in due measure (μετρίως οἶκ' ἐρῶσθαι), but that ideal rule may exist even without laws was something harder (χαλεπός) for a hearer to accept. (*Pol.* 293e)

This remark, I believe, should be understood as a signal to the reader that the answer given by the Stranger in response to this challenge deserves our fullest attention. The Stranger replies to Young Socrates by noting that laws are general, and as a result, they do not always accurately prescribe what is best in particular cases. Moreover, the Stranger uses this opportunity as a springboard for discussing law. He offers the analogy of an athletic coach. If a coach is training a team, the same general instructions will apply to everyone in the group. Ideally, though, specific instructions will be tailored to the particular circumstances of each athlete. If a coach prescribes a different regimen for some particular athlete, the peculiarity would be understood as beneficial for the entire team. Furthermore, when the coach is absent, the foregoing instructions should be followed as closely as possible. And upon returning, it would be perfectly acceptable for the coach to change these instructions at will. Applying this analogy to politics, statesmen

should be free to change any existing laws as they see fit, and in their absence, the law should be strictly observed. Incidentally, I think the setting for the dialogue is pertinent to this analogy. The dialogue takes place in a palaestra, a wrestling school (implied at *Pol.* 257c), and this is Young Socrates' first attempt at figuratively wrestling with the ideas put forth by the Stranger. Indeed, whereas latitude is encouraged in an athletic coach for modifying a training program, the same discretion is difficult to grant when proposed analogously for a political leader. More basically, however, the analogy is designed to show that a genuine statesman always acts out of concern for the benefit and preservation of the city. This is accomplished not by writing down rules, but rather by directing affairs in accordance with the art of statesmanship.

Whereas the prevailing criteria are here dismissed, one rather stark conclusion is keenly anticipated by Young Socrates: a genuine constitution could not take the form of a democracy. When asked by the Stranger whether the art of statesmanship appears to be the kind of thing that could be acquired by a large number of people, Young Socrates responds that if it were possible to be acquired by even a tenth of the population, "it would be quite the easiest of all sorts of expertise there are" (*Pol.* 292e).<sup>115</sup> After all, Young Socrates continues, with even simple board games, there are only a handful of top players.<sup>116</sup> The Stranger congratulates Young Socrates for this answer and decides that

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<sup>115</sup> Exactly why this is so obvious to Young Socrates is unclear. If Protagoras were present from the eponymous dialogue, he would likely suggest that such expertise is bestowed to each of us equally by the gods (*Prot.* 322d).

<sup>116</sup> This passage should be compared with *Rep.* VI 493e and 503d on the rarity of traits considered essential in rulers. Cf. *Laws* 709e for the relative flexibility of traits in the absolute dictator who first orders Magnesia.

they should look to other forms of government for a genuine constitution. Much can be made of this small passage, but its anti-democratic implication is mitigated by fact that genuine constitutions are no longer extant among the existing forms of government.

Among the more important passages for understanding the political theory in the *Statesman* is the explanation provided by the Stranger for how it came to be that the ideal of a statesman-run constitution is no longer possible (*Pol.* 298a-300e). The passage is further discussed below, at 4.3. The Stranger imagines a situation where doctors and captains are suspected of malevolence and relieved of their authority by a decree that establishes a council to decide on matters pertaining to medicine and navigation by majority vote. In such a situation, the arts of medicine and navigation would be destroyed, and their destruction would be permanent, since anyone caught investigating these arts contrary to procedure would face the harshest penalties. The significance of this passage will be explored in 4.3, but the basic message is that, in the absence of statesmanship, the best thing to do is to enforce the existing laws and to ensure that the elected officials are subject to them. With no one in possession of statecraft, following the laws constitutes a spurious attempt to imitate the rule of the statesman. Still, it remains an imitation of the true constitution, and to proceed otherwise would be even worse.

It is with this in mind that the various constitutional forms are refigured and ranked. Because imitating the true constitution well means never transgressing the law once it has been established, lawfulness becomes the new criterion for evaluating the imitative constitutions (*Pol.* 303ab). When a single leader rules in accordance with law, the constitution is a monarchy, and by far the best and most tolerable of cities. But when

such a single ruler disregards the law—that is, under a tyranny—the constitution is the worst and most intolerable. The other forms are evaluated accordingly, with the added division of democracy into two forms (constitutional and direct, to use anachronistic terms), with the final list of constitutional forms numbering seven: six imitative and one genuine.

The dialogue ends rather quickly following this digression, after a brief return to the account of statesmanship. The divisions are completed by arranging the direct causes responsible for the care of the human herd. The final discussion concerns the manner by which the statesman weaves the social fabric together to ensure the integrity of the polis.<sup>117</sup> Though brief, this final section is rich with ideas that by this point come across as merely theoretical, given the preceding discussion. If the art of statesmanship really has been permanently destroyed, then it seems redundant to discuss the practicalities of the art. Nevertheless, the statesman is described as controlling the arts of oratory, generalship, and judgeship, and as cementing disparate virtues with education and something akin to eugenics. Statesmanship is endowed with the authority to decide whether the subordinate arts should be applied in a given situation. Thus, the statesman decides on the issues pertaining to justice by establishing laws, whereas the judge presides over matters of conflict between citizens on the basis of these laws (*Pol.* 305bc).

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<sup>117</sup> White insists that the statesman here described is not the true statesman. Rather, White, *MMDPS*, 119, thinks that the characteristics expounded here are meant to apply to the “best available ruler.” This suggestion somewhat alleviates the problem regarding the pertinence of this section given the permanent destruction of the true art of statesmanship. However, the reading would seem to ignore the fact that the ruler is repeatedly said to establish laws (see esp. *Pol.* 305d). Given that in the absence of statesmanship, the existing laws should be strictly observed, this “best” charlatan (as White sees it) is granted an uncharacteristic degree of power and tasked with a considerable burden given his ignorance of statecraft.

Likewise, the statesman decides whether to engage in war and whether to withdraw (*Pol.* 304e). But it is left to the general to decide how to make war—to devise strategy—once it has been declared. And finally, the statesman determines whether to persuade or compel (or teach),<sup>118</sup> whereas it is left to the art of rhetoric to decide the means by which to persuade. In general, statesmanship “must not itself perform practical tasks, but control those with the capacity to perform them, because it knows when it is the right time (□γκαιρία) to begin and set in motion the most important things in cities” (*Pol.* 305d).<sup>119</sup> This explains why statesmanship was initially placed among theoretical (γνωστική) rather than practical (πρακτική) arts (*Pol.* 259d).

A curious topic is taken up in the final pages of the dialogue. The Stranger argues that the virtues of courage and moderation are “extremely hostile (□χθρός) to each other” (*Pol.* 306b). This, he admits, is in sharp contrast to the prevailing opinion on the parts of virtue and their relationship (*Pol.* 306a).<sup>120</sup> He explains that courage manifests itself as

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<sup>118</sup> The distinction is somewhat interesting. Rhetoric is an alternative to teaching. The statesman decides when education is necessary and when the matter should be addressed “through the telling of stories, and not through teaching” (*Pol.* 304d). This is consistent with the rather pessimistic conclusion in the *Gorgias* that rhetoric is inherently powerless to communicate truth. But it is inconsistent with more optimistic approach to the potential for rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*. The application of rhetoric is further contrasted with “the use of some sort of force” (*Pol.* 304d) to achieve something. This should be a bit puzzling to Young Socrates who much earlier agreed that the statesman does not rule through compulsion (*Pol.* 276e).

<sup>119</sup> See Lane, *MPPS*, for an extensive defense of proper timing as the central characteristic of statesmen. Lane’s thesis is that *kairos* is the unifying theme in the dialogue. However, in this section, *kairos* is only specifically mentioned in the passage just quoted. The emphasis throughout this section is on *whether* to apply a subordinate art, not *when* it should be applied. Of course, knowing the former entails knowing the latter. But if (as Lane insists) *kairos* plays such a crucial role for understanding the *Statesman*, one would expect different diction in this section especially.

<sup>120</sup> See Skemp, *Statesman*, 222 n. 1, for the argument that the Academy is intended here. It would have been an important tenet of the Academy that the virtues are never in conflict, notes Skemp. The Stranger’s position amounts to a rejection of the unity of virtue. However, Skemp insists throughout his commentary that the *Statesman* is written in part to satirize the Academy, esp. in making so much of division. According

vigor and speed, whereas moderation is exhibited in gentleness and hesitancy. Now, because the souls of individuals are “by nature (φύσις)” (*Pol.* 310a) inclined either toward courage or moderation, those inclined toward courage are often prone to excess and mania, while those inclined toward temperance are susceptible to cowardice and lethargy. In recognizing this, the statesman seeks to bridge these virtues by mitigating the conflict between them. To do so, the statesman employs a “bond (δεσμός)” the Stranger claims is “divine (θεῖος)” (*Pol.* 309c). This bond exists in the souls of individuals and it is constituted by the nature of its opinions (δόξα) regarding the just, fine, and good. When these opinions are true (ἄληθής), the bond tames the courageous soul, and it makes a moderate soul sufficiently prudent (φρόνιμος) to fulfill public duties. With the proper educational platform, the Stranger concludes, the statesman can forge together the disparate parts of the soul.<sup>121</sup> The other tactic open to the statesman in reconciling the parts of the soul is through marriage. By dictating a policy of intermarriage between the courageous and the moderate, the statesman ensures that the city as a whole is properly integrated.<sup>122</sup> The Stranger again refers to this as a bond, a “human (ἄνθρωπινος)” bond (*Pol.* 310a). Indeed, the diction used throughout this section of the dialogue calls to mind

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to Skemp, the *Statesman* is subtly mocking the practices of the Academy witnessed by Plato upon his return from abroad: see esp. Skemp, *Statesman*, 67.

<sup>121</sup> This kind of education resembles the social learning program that Rawls argues is needed for the stability of the state. Both Rawls and Plato insist on a moral education to establish a theory of the good in the citizenry, without which the state is inherently unstable. The issue worth addressing, perhaps, is to just what extent this amounts to a kind of brainwashing. See Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, sec. 76, 434-441.

<sup>122</sup> See Skemp, *Statesman*, 232 n. 2, for an argument against Diès’ interesting suggestion that “intertwining” refers to the marriage between citizens of different cities and that a policy of adoption is intended, and not eugenics.



the weaving metaphor, with the statesman combining the warp and woof of the courageous and the moderate to produce a “fine-woven (ἰφασμα συνάγοντα) fabric” (*Pol.* 311a).<sup>123</sup> The reason for the need to intervene in marital matters is that we have a natural inclination to procreate with those who share a similar disposition to us. The Stranger warns that over time, if marriage is not strictly regulated, the citizens will reach intractable extremes, as the moderate procreate with other moderates and the courageous with their like. The implication is that at that time factions will arise and civil war will break out. The city will become two cities, to use language from the other dialogues (*Rep.* 422e and *Laws* 715b), and it will be ultimately destroyed from within. In addition, in such a state, the city is especially vulnerable to attack from outside enemies as well (*Pol.* 307e). In order to prevent this from happening, statesmen must enact a strict martial policy in conjunction with an education program to communicate certain true opinions. These two bonds serve to hold the city together—to preserve it and “bring life together in agreement and friendship” (*Pol.* 311c). It is with this final point that the Stranger declares the account complete, with Socrates (in most translations identified as the older Socrates) expressing his approval. In these final pages, then, we are finally provided with at least some details regarding the actual practice of statesmanship. Approaching the matter in broad strokes, and without the sort of attention to detail witnessed in earlier sections of the dialogue, we learn that statesmanship involves managing certain cooperative arts and

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<sup>123</sup> A precise description of how this might be accomplished is never given, as it is in the *Republic*. But here, the state’s responsibility to dictate on such matters applies to all citizens. In the *Republic*, by contrast, the eugenics program applies only to the guardian class. It is worth adding that in Book V of the *Laws* (at 739c), such a strict policy on marriages is agreed to be an ideal that is unattainable, and practically speaking the rulers should instead focus on population control (see also *Laws* IV 720e re laws concerning marriage).

instituting policy on education and marriage. This section will be of special interest to scholars who study the eugenics of the *Republic* and of general interest to the debate over the unity of virtue in Plato's dialogues. But as with much of the *Statesman*, it is unclear how this or any of the political theory here is meant to connect with the other components in the dialogue.

## 4.2 Recognizing the Statesman

To shed light on the complexities and puzzles in the political theory of the *Statesman*, it is helpful to approach the dialogue broadly and as a whole. To do this, I believe, it is pertinent to apply the observations made about method with the details in the myth in an effort to reveal the subtleties to the points expounded in the previous section. If we approach the dialogue as Sayre does, with an exclusive focus on the method, we risk a reading of the dialogue that ignores its political intricacies.<sup>124</sup> This approach would be parallel to reading the *Republic* as a treatise mainly on psychology.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, the Kallipolis is presented as an analogy to the soul of an individual, but there is little reason to approach the rich observations on politics from the point of view of psychology alone—were it even possible to do so. Sayre is of course correct to point out that in several places in the *Statesman*—and particularly in the digression at *Pol.* 285d-287b—the main goal of the inquiry is explicitly said to be related to dialectic: “the greatest and

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<sup>124</sup> See Sayre, *MMPS*, but also his *Plato's Late Ontology*. Ironically, Sayre is perhaps the most meticulous commentator on the political passages, approaching each detail with painstaking care. Nevertheless, he is altogether indifferent to the political implications of the discussion, preferring in every case to treat the dialogue as a methodologically rich avenue into Plato's metaphysics.

<sup>125</sup> No scholar as far as I know actually attempts this, but Kraut, “Reason and Justice,” among others, comes close. Cf., however, Cooper, “Psychology of Justice.”

primary value to the pursuit itself of the ability to divide by classes” (*Pol.* 386d). However, even if Plato’s intention in writing the dialogue were primarily methodological, the political theory that is in fact advanced yields important and worthwhile considerations with regard to constitutionalism, sovereignty, and leadership. Moreover, there are a number of nuances to the political theory that reveal themselves only by reference to the other parts in the dialogue. Part of the answer to the question of unity in the dialogue, I submit, lies in a seemingly deliberate attempt to underscore the sheer difficulty in recognizing a true statesman.

Consider the perspective of the citizens described in the analogy on the destruction of the arts of medicine and navigation (*Pol.* 297e-300e). Having usurped the authority of doctors and captains, these citizens—or their descendants, as it were—find themselves in a situation where elected officials decide on matters pertaining to medicine and navigation based on what they together agree is best. Without any knowledge of the arts, their decisions cannot be adjudicated according to any reasonable standard. Worse still, they have legislated against scientific inquiries into these arts, spelling the utter and permanent destruction of such arts. Ignoring for a moment that these arts shall never return, and supposing that someone emerges who truly does possess such an art, how could the knowledge that such an individual has be recognized? From the perspective of the citizens, there is no assured way by which to verify professed knowledge of this sort. Were someone to proclaim expertise in medicine or navigation, it would be impossible to confirm. We might propose that it should be left to the philosopher to recognize such knowledge in purported experts. Alas, despite the fact that at the beginning of the *Sophist* (271b) the Stranger promises to inquire into the nature of philosophy after investigating

sophistry and statesmanship, the *Philosopher* was never written.<sup>126</sup> Had it been written, though, we might learn that part of the function of philosophy is the ability to identify expertise in others. After all, this is exactly the kind of thing Socrates is well known for doing. If Socrates were available to scrutinize a given person's claims to expertise in statesmanship, say, he could distinguish between a fraudulent and genuine statesman. Moreover, this appears to be the very project underway in the *Statesman*, with each division ostensibly coming closer to revealing the statesman. Each competitor and imitator must first be removed by division "if we are going to see plainly what we are looking for" (*Pol.* 291c). Still, this answer is problematic. First, philosophers are unlikely to be entrusted with the task of accrediting experts who will lead the people in all matters concerning the state. It is challenging enough for them to escape persecution. Second, it is more than likely the case that genuine philosophers are at least as rare as true statesmen. And third, if philosophy is the sole candidate for accurately recognizing statesmen, then some means for recognizing genuine philosophers must be found in turn. Short of living in the Kallipolis where philosophers are already kings and where institutions are designed to protect the future of philosophy, there are no reliable means available to citizens for recognizing true expertise, whether it be philosophy or statesmanship.

As it happens, the difficulty in recognizing expertise is a point that gets stressed repeatedly throughout the *Statesman*. This point has been developed above, in 2.1, where

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<sup>126</sup> The absence of this dialogue has aroused much suspicion. For a thorough and complete treatment of the matter, see Gill, *Philosophos*.

a number of passages were provided as support. But it is worth reflecting on the political implications of this difficulty. In the *Sophist*, the target of the inquiry is ubiquitous. Sophistry appears in each of the seven attempts at revealing it. Whereas the project in the *Sophist* is to isolate and capture the sophist, so that there is nowhere “where he can go to escape from our account” (*Soph.* 231c), the *Statesman* has a different objective. In pursuing the statesman, the challenge is rather to expose those who crowd around him (*Pol.* 291c), to reveal their deceit. Only by eliminating the competitors will the statesman be revealed. The inquiry is compared to the refinement of gold—“separating out the earth, and stones, and many different things; and after these, there remain commingled with the gold those things that are akin to it, precious things and only removable with the use of fire” (*Pol.* 303de). Finding the statesman is hard work, though the reward is worth the effort. Hence, the Stranger is unapologetic about the lengthy digressions and rather tedious divisions involved in seeking an account of statesmanship. The process must be pursued slowly and methodically.

It is less something intrinsic to statesmanship, I take it, and more something about us—and Young Socrates—that makes the inquiry so painstaking. An early passage deserves some attention:

So in what direction will one discover the path that leads to the statesman? For we must discover it, and after having separated it from the rest we must impress (□πισφραγίζω) one character on it; and having stamped (□πισφραγίζω) a single different form on the other turnings we must make (ποιέω) our minds (ψυχή) think of all the sorts of knowledge there are as falling into two classes. (*Pol.* 258c)

Division is not merely a cognitively passive activity. It does not only involve seeing where the cuts should be made and then dividing accordingly. Rather, as this passage emphasizes, division requires forcing our souls to perceive matters in a certain way. A complementary idea is suggested in the *Phaedo* in Socrates' rebuttal to Simmias. Socrates explains that in reading Anaxagoras' claim that the mind is the cause of everything, he came to understand that the inquiry into causes depends on understanding how things ought to be (*Phaedo* 97cd). And in the *Gorgias*, Socrates explains that if the soul did not govern the body and if expertise could be learned by the body itself, "the world of Anaxagoras would prevail...all things would be mixed together" (*Gorg.* 465d). The process of recognizing the arrangement and the causes of things is a matter of correctly aligning the soul so that it can discern things the way they should be, and not jumbled together. Thus, we should take seriously the Stranger's warning that particular divisions are especially difficult. It is not that they are difficult for the Stranger, or that they were at one time difficult for him to discover and that now he can just tell Young Socrates what they are. Nor is it because of something in the art of statesmanship itself that penalizes or resists inquiry. Rather, it is difficult to recognize the division once it has been made, to force the soul to see the kinds thus divided. In other words, it is difficult to accept the division as such. When the statesman is finally distinguished from the chorus of the magician-sophist, it is said to have required considerable effort (*Pol.* 303d). The effort referred to here in making such divisions is a cognitive effort in recognizing the differences between true leaders and those charlatans who crowd around him. To be sure, the effort includes the lengthy process of categorizing the imitative forms of government and identifying the "experts in faction (στασιαστικοί)" (*Pol.* 303c), but this is merely a

matter of listing and arranging divided parts—for which all the credit goes to the Stranger. The real difficulty is the effort needed to align the soul such that it sees the arrangement correctly—not with everything mixed together as one, but with each in its appropriate place. And it is especially difficult when this requires divisions into matters that have long been thought inseparable, or when they have been separated in the wrong way. Thus, Young Socrates must set aside any conventions he may have held regarding the division of constitutional forms into three (or five), and he must come to see the nature of all these constitutional forms as false imitations of the genuine constitution. This done, he can appreciate the similarities to the various imitative governments and their collective dissimilarity vis-a-vis the statesman-run constitution. He can, in other words, see where the two groups come apart.

One point made in 4.1, above, here deserves a fuller treatment. Scholars treat the chorus referred to at *Pol.* 291c as including the magician-sophist among the servants and subordinates.<sup>127</sup> I suggested that, whereas the chorus itself is correctly classified there, the leader of this chorus, the “greatest magician of all the sophists,” should be distinguished from the chorus. I think it is a misreading of the text to suppose that this magician is part of the chorus that the Stranger identifies among the servants and subordinates. The Stranger notes that the members of this chorus resemble lions, centaurs, satyrs, and “those animals that are weak but versatile” (*Pol.* 291b). The

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<sup>127</sup> To my knowledge, no scholar has denied this. Sayre, *MMPS*, 117, explicitly asserts that the members of the chorus are all sophists. White, *MMDPS*, 103, supposes that each member of the chorus applies to each of the imitative constitutions, and simply ignores the fact that the chorus is led by the magician-sophist. Both Chiara-Quenzer, “Purpose,” 111 and Dorter, *FGPED*, 221, amalgamate the chorus with the leader, and further insist that the leader belongs among the servants and subordinates, as well as the statesman (see n. 111, above).

versatility of the chorus comes from their ability to “exchange their shapes and capacity for action.” And the Stranger notes that they are the chorus of those who concern themselves with government affairs (*Pol.* 291c). However, the text does not strictly admit the magician-sophist within the chorus. In fact, the logic of the text suggests that having recognized the chorus, and placed it among the servants and subordinates, the Stranger has, by virtue of doing so, separated it from the statesman. Why then, if the magician-sophist is a part of this chorus, does the Stranger then proceed to worry about the difficulty in separating this magician-sophist from true experts in the art of statesmanship? That is to say, given an admittedly fussy reading of this passage, the chorus has been successfully distinguished from the statesman. The chorus is thus in the company of priests, heralds, and slaves—a group necessarily subordinate, unlike the statesman (*pace* Dorter and Chiara-Quenzer, see n. 127, above). The magician-sophist, then, cannot be thought to be a member of this chorus, since if that were the case, there would be no need to distinguish him from the statesman. Furthermore, on my reading, this chorus is an aggregate of arts that, while not necessarily subordinate, find that they are subordinate in the absence of the statesman. Oratory provides the best example for this—though the same could easily be said of judgeship. Oratory, as described in the *Gorgias*, is a servile pseudo-art, subject to the desires of the audience. In a democracy, the art of rhetoric is at the service of an assembly or jury. But in a true constitution, orators take their orders from a statesman, alongside judges and generals. These are not slavish pseudo-arts when they are correctly managed by a statesman. Yet, they become slavish in imitative constitutions. Oratory is elevated from a pseudo-art to among the highest arts in the city, directly cooperating with the art proper to human caretaking. The



Stranger has difficulty seeing this group, and perceives them as odd creatures, just because of their versatile status as hybrid arts.

In any case, this positive reading is little more than speculation. There is nothing in the scholarship to support this reading, and textual evidence for it is scant. Nevertheless, there is no strict textual basis for the standard interpretation at all. A close reading of the text at *Pol.* 291c should at least cast severe doubt on the standard interpretation. It must be admitted, however, that this dialogue invites a number of such speculative readings as a result of its frequent ambiguities, which, it would seem, are deliberate. For instance, the objects of division are obscure and ambiguous in the text. As explained in 2.2, above, scholars disagree over whether division operates on forms, classes of forms, or classes of particulars. This issue is exacerbated by the Stranger's loose and irregular use of terms with metaphysical connotations (especially *genos*, *meros*, and *eidos*), and his explicit hostility to technical language (*Pol.* 261e). Moreover, it is difficult to read the myth without seeing it as deliberately abstruse. This is not to say that there are inconsistencies in the account, but it would appear that naming the divine helmsman, for instance, is purposefully avoided—though attributed to Cronus. And perhaps the most egregious example of this is the Eleatic Stranger himself. He is nameless and reveals nothing about himself. And he is oddly confident in his approach. In the *Sophist*, Socrates warns Theodorus that the Stranger may be a god in disguise who is here to keep tabs on public affairs, “both criminal and lawful” (*Soph.* 216b).<sup>128</sup> The

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<sup>128</sup> On this point it is worth adding that the *Theaetetus* ends with Socrates leaving to formally address Meletus' charges with an *antomosia* at the King's Porch. He returns the next day (in the *Sophist*) to the

Stranger is connected with Zeus, the god of justice (*Soph.* 216b, *Pol.* 257b), and the method of division he exemplifies is elsewhere called god-like and god-given by Socrates (*Phaedr.* 266b, *Philb.* 16c). These ambiguities in the text reflect the general ambiguity of the discussion. As Rosen contends, the *Statesman* contains no explicit arguments, but only “ambiguous treatments” that are unclearly defined and littered with mistakes.<sup>129</sup> In Rosen’s opinion, the explicit argument is the dialogue itself, in its entirety. Indeed, the statesman is never defined in a substantive way that could serve as a benchmark against which to compare leaders. Rather, the statesman is ultimately a vacillating figure, ruling by consent or through force, through law or without law, from wealth or poverty, etc. And it is not ultimately clear whether such an expertise is even practically possible. The dialogue appears eager to lead the reader in one direction only to then pull in another, as with the ostensible utopia of the Cronians who are subsequently described as relatively unhappy. We should not read the *Statesman* to find clear and hard answers concerning political matters. Still less could it be considered anything like a manual for aspiring leaders. Rather, the obscurantist aspects in the text reinforce the difficulty and messiness of any prospective inquiry into so great a subject as statecraft, and (as I shall defend in 4.4, below) to promote the rule of law by dismissing the possibility of statesmanship’s return.

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palaestra only to find that the Stranger has suddenly arrived in town and that he will take Socrates’ place in the discussion.

<sup>129</sup> Rosen, *Plato’s Statesman*, 66.

### 4.3 Parts Management

The interpretive challenges and the array of ambiguities in the *Statesman* discussed in the previous section should not deter us from drawing at least some definite conclusions from the dialogue, and especially from the political theory espoused by the Stranger. There are features to statesmanship that a careful reader is intended to notice.

First, it is made straightforwardly clear from the passage on the arts that cooperate with statesmanship (*Pol.* 303b-305e) that the statesman manages the parts of a whole. In particular, the statesman judges whether to invoke oratory or generalship, and authorizes these arts by sanctioning speeches or war. In general, the statesman is responsible for ensuring that the city as a whole is resilient to both internal and external threats, and that it benefits collectively from the various policies and laws that are instituted. To do so, statesmen apply their expertise in general written and unwritten rules (*Pol.* 295a), through purges of the population by sending out colonies or contrarily through mass immigration (*Pol.* 293de), and by setting into motion the policies pivotal to the benefit of the city (*Pol.* 305d). In short, the statesman orchestrates the various parts of the city such that they work together as a whole. To properly manage these parts, however, the statesman must be able to recognize them and to understand their relation to the whole and to the other parts. This is especially evident in the manner by which the statesman implements the intermarriage between the courageous and moderate citizens. Even though the Stranger passes over a discussion regarding how these dispositions might be measured in order to correctly identify them, it nonetheless follows from his point that a genuine statesman must be able to devise some means for doing so. In this way, the work of the statesman is manifestly similar to the method of division used to reveal him. What I have called the

first stage in the account of the statesman (see 2.2.1, above) corresponds to the necessary skill the statesman must possess for identifying the parts of a group. Likewise, the second stage corresponds to the statesman's ability to recognize the relationship between parts and to the whole as such. Saunders concludes the same basic point by attempting to explain the apparent disappearance of philosophical knowledge as a prerequisite for legitimate rule. Saunders argues that this view is mistaken: the statesman must undergo philosophical training. The statesman is, after all, a divider.<sup>130</sup> Whereas I agree that the statesman is a divider, I find Saunders' reasons for thinking the statesman needs philosophical training less compelling. For Saunders, the statesman must be everything the philosopher king is and more—more, because the statesman must also have practical experience. However, it does not seem to me that the statesman necessarily needs any noetic-type knowledge of the sort unique to philosopher kings in the *Republic*. At least I can find nothing in text to support this view. Also, I can find no specific passage that confirms Saunders' claim that the statesman has practical experience, despite an intuitive sense that this is likely to be the case. Nevertheless, the manner by which the statesman manages the parts of the whole is parallel to the method of division exemplified by the Stranger. In this sense, Saunders is right to call the statesman a divider. And if this is indeed correct, a potential consequence to this parallel will be that in better understanding the two-fold nature of the Stranger's method, we can flesh out in more detail the practices of statesmanship that are merely mentioned, rather than explored.

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<sup>130</sup> Saunders, "Plato's Later," 466.

The second relevant feature is that, in addition to being a divider, the statesman is a weaver. This function of statesmanship is best observed in the description of the two bonds that forge the social fabric, as explained above in 4.1. As Cooper rightly observes, “we are justified—indeed obligated, if we wish to read the dialogue with the care it itself asks for—in reading and applying this [weaving] model extremely closely.”<sup>131</sup> I have already applied the weaving analogy to better situate the two stages in the account of statesmanship (see 2.2, above). However, some additional points can also be made.

Notably and as one might guess, weaving was traditionally women’s work in ancient Greece.<sup>132</sup> So, it is odd to find Cooper claiming that only male citizens are eligible for political offices (e.g. as judges and orators) in the *Statesman*. Cooper’s only textual support for this claim is the passage at the very end of the dialogue, where the political fabric woven together by the application of the art of statesmanship is said to cover “all the other inhabitants of cities, both slave and free” (*Pol.* 311c). Cooper argues that these “other inhabitants” could only refer to women, children, slaves, and metics. A bizarre inference leads Cooper to this conclusion. He argues that because the Stranger points out (at *Pol.* 308e) that dispositions incapable of both moderation and courage will be cast out of the statesman-run constitution, it follows that the divine bond of education will be applied to all other citizens. The fabric referred to is constituted by everyone to whom this bond has been applied—i.e. everyone who is educated. So far so good.

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<sup>131</sup> Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 173.

<sup>132</sup> Skemp, *Statesman*, 44 n. 1, provides a list of literary sources that confirm this, noting that it was not uncommon for authors to associate weaving with politics. To this list, we should add one of Plato’s own: viz. *Rep.* 455c, where weaving is listed as one of a number of arts at which women excel over men.

However, because the passage quoted above imagines a fabric covering “*all* the other inhabitants of cities, both slave and *free*” (emphasis mine), Cooper believes that there must be a group of free inhabitants who are not eligible for office. This group, he decides, must be women. Women, Cooper infers, are neither educated nor eligible for office. I find it somewhat surprising that this sort of analytical reasoning is stretched so far over so little text merely for the sake of deducing a point that contradicts Plato’s writings both before the *Statesman* (in the *Republic*) and after it (in the *Laws*). Nevertheless, the argument can be rebutted on its own terms: the other free inhabitants referred to are the metics and children—admitting that this might not be a very large group, the exact number of which would depend on when children begin this particular sort of education. The other criticism worth adding here is this: by Cooper’s own admission, the fabric is constituted by everyone to whom the divine bond of education has been applied; yet, Cooper must also admit that it is constituted by everyone to whom the human bond of marriage has been applied as well, and this of course includes women. He must admit the latter on the basis of *Pol.* 311b, where the fabric is said to be the product of “the weaving together, with regular intertwining, of the dispositions of the brave and moderate.” Both bonds achieve this intertwining, so there is no reason to dismiss one and not the other.

With these two features of the statesman—that the statesman is a divider and a weaver—we can find further parallels with the myth and method. For instance, the Stranger’s role with regard to Young Socrates in the discussion is parallel to the role of the statesman vis-a-vis the citizens infused with the bond of true opinion. The Stranger decides what is best for Young Socrates in terms of his becoming a better dialectician (e.g. at *Pol.* 264b). Moreover, if White is correct, the account of statesmanship as

developed through the discussion of the divisions is in fact a “protracted statement of a true opinion,” and not knowledge.<sup>133</sup> Granting that this is the case, the very discussion itself, insofar as it supplies Young Socrates with true opinion, cements in him exactly the thing that the statesman cements with the divine bond to mitigate the virtues. It is worth noting that Cooper provides an excellent description of divine bond, contrasting it with true opinion in the *Meno*.<sup>134</sup> If Cooper is correct that true opinion in the *Statesman* means something very different—and the case he establishes is indeed persuasive—then perhaps what the Stranger is doing for Young Socrates is not *exactly* what the Statesman does for citizens. That is, perhaps a qualification is needed to distinguish between the epistemic nature of the account of statesmanship and the divine bond of true opinion that characterizes the well-governed citizens. In any case, there is a clear parallel to be found. To draw parallels such as these between the method and the politics is instrumental in addressing the question posed by Saunders regarding the purported disappearance of the philosopher king. If such connections can be made between the methodology (i.e. of dialectics) and the political practices of the statesman, a better answer might be provided to explain the role of philosophy in Plato’s mature political theory. I shall not address this issue in any depth, as it entails a protracted treatment of the *Republic*. However, Schofield discusses this point in detail, exploring the several options that are available for comparing the relation between philosophy and politics in the *Republic* to that of the

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<sup>133</sup> White, *MMDPS*, 98.

<sup>134</sup> Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 183f.

*Statesman* and the *Laws*.<sup>135</sup> Of particular interest, however, is that Schofield argues that the *Statesman* can be understood to present a top-down approach to the question of politics, insofar as its theory understands the validity of a constitution to depend on the expertise (or lack thereof) in the ruler. By contrast, the *Laws* and the *Republic* exhibit a bottom-up approach to politics, where the answer to politics is found in the specific makeup of the constitution itself. I find Schofield's comparison somewhat equivocal. In both the *Laws* and the *Republic* the validity of the constitution might be argued to depend on the sovereign ruler, and that this sovereign ruler is in both cases the laws. On this reading, the *Laws* and the *Republic* can also be said to adopt a top-down approach. Moreover, and perhaps more to the point, in comparing the manner by which humans are tended to in the Age of Cronus with the manner by which they are cared for under the leadership of the statesman in the Age of Zeus, the statesman can be thought to adopt a truly bottom-up approach to politics. Whereas Cronus, in steering the cosmos, manages the whole, the statesman must manage the parts. For Cronus, the *parts* are correctly arranged just because the *whole* is properly directed. For the statesman, on the other hand, the *whole* is correctly arranged just because the *parts* are properly directed. Given that the statesman directly intervenes in the affairs of the city, by overriding laws under particular circumstances and by setting policy, the statesman might be said to have a considerably more bottom-up approach to politics than the guardians in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Of course, strictly speaking, the *Statesman* maintains what Schofield means by a top-down approach with regard to the question of political legitimacy. Nonetheless, the

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<sup>135</sup> Schofield, *Saving the City*, 28-45.



expertise itself tends to emphasize the arrangement of parts and the importance of the particular rather than the universal, especially with regard to law.<sup>136</sup> In any case, this is yet another example of the need to consider the myth and the methodology to accurately characterize how the statesman manages the parts of the whole. I concede to Schofield that expertise is the criterion that legitimates a constitution in the *Statesman*—in fact, the expertise of statesmanship is arguably the sovereign power in this constitution—but this expertise consists in the ability to correctly discern the *parts* of a whole and to recognize how they fit together—from the bottom up, as it were.

#### 4.4 Statesmanship and its Imitation

Let us turn now to a closer examination of the passage where the Stranger describes the destruction of the arts of medicine and navigation, and, by analogy, statesmanship (*Pol.* 297e-300e). He invites Young Socrates to imagine a group—specifically a “council (βουλή)” (*Pol.* 298b6)—who decide to take matters regarding navigation and medicine into their own hands. In explaining why this might happen with doctors and captains, the Stranger offers the following:

For the one as much as the other saves whichever of us he wishes to save; and whichever of us they wish to mutilate, they do it by cutting and burning us and directing us to pay them expenses as if they were taxes, of which they spend little or none on the patient, while they themselves and their household use the rest; and the final step is for them to take money from relatives or some enemies of the patient as pay for killing them. (*Pol.* 198ab)

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<sup>136</sup> This is what Schofield, *Saving the City*, 35, calls “political particularism.”

The Stranger goes on to explain that captains are often thought guilty of a similar malfeasance when they throw the crew overboard, cause shipwrecks, and leave sailors stranded (*Pol.* 198b). This passage reads somewhat oddly. Certainly, it is easy to imagine patients doubting the intentions of a doctor. And the history of mutiny is evidence that captains often have a tenuous grip over their crew. Nevertheless, applied to the statesman, this would constitute something like mass paranoia. In a city under the direction of a true statesman, it would seem unlikely that the citizens would hold such an opinion of the statesman. Moreover, the implication seems to be that such a statesman would be corrupt, or at least thought to be. If the analogy holds, the statesman is believed by the people to embezzle taxes and punish arbitrarily. I think this is stretching the analogy a bit. Rather, the point is more basic: there is just something about leaders that arouses suspicion. The suggestion, it appears, is that the destruction of the arts begins with the collective suspicion by the citizenry and their unwillingness to trust in the authority of the sovereign. Moreover, it would seem that the Stranger is suggesting that there is something inherently unstable about such expertise. A fragment from Heraclitus is helpful in highlighting the contradictory nature of medicine: “Physicians who cut and burn complain that they receive no worthy pay, although they do these things” (*Frag.* 10.61).<sup>137</sup> Similarly, the statesman’s absolute authority to contravene laws and arrange marriages is likely to be thought dubious, at least by anyone directly affected. It is perhaps best, then, to interpret the Stranger here as suggesting that, owing to the

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<sup>137</sup> McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, 118 n. 17, explains that, although the text is problematic, the point is that physicians consider it justified to be paid for curing pain with more pain because they alleviate (malignant) pains by inflicting (beneficial) pains.

contradictory nature of expertise such as medicine and statesmanship, it is unsurprising that they are often mistrusted.

In any case, the result of this mistrust is a decree by the council such that, from now on, an assembly will decide matters related to navigation and medicine (*Pol.* 298c). The Stranger adds that this assembly might consist of everyone, only the rich, or only the council itself. This implies that the eradication of statesmanship does not depend on the constitutional form that arises in its place. Democracy, in other words, is not solely responsible. Nevertheless, the text that follows alludes to a number of institutions that were present in Athens, such as annual terms for magistrates (*Pol.* 298e) and the *euthunai* of officers to review their performance (*Pol.* 299a).<sup>138</sup> And it is surely an allusion to the historical Socrates when the Stranger predicts that anyone found investigating this sort of expertise would be indicted and faced with “the most extreme penalties” for doing so (*Pol.* 299b). Noting that the dialogue is set in 399, in the days just before Socrates’ trial (see n. 127, above), Plato’s immediate audience must have surely understood this as an allegory for post-Periclean Athens.

One further section warrants attention. At *Pol.* 299d, a long list of arts is included alongside medicine and navigation: generalship and all the hunting arts, painting and all the arts of imitation, carpentry and all of the arts of tool-making, and farming and all the arts related to plants. Then, the Stranger asks Young Socrates to consider these arts as falling victim to the same fate as medicine and navigation. Young Socrates decides that

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<sup>138</sup> On these institutions, see Harris, *DRLCA*, 48. On the volatile relationship in Athens between the council and the assembly, see Pomeroy, *Ancient Greece*, 103.

in that case *all* the arts would be destroyed and that they would never be restored (*Pol.* 299e). This is curious addition. For the sake of the argument the Stranger is making, this list is unnecessary, even confounding. Statesmanship is more closely related to medicine and navigation than the art of painting, for instance. So, why is this list introduced? Furthermore, is it plausible to imagine that people would actually want to oust carpenters, say, and establish an assembly of non-experts to decide how couches ought to be built?

The apparent reason for providing this list is to develop an argument for why the rules enacted by an assembly of non-experts should, nonetheless, be followed. The reason given for following such rules is that they imitate true expertise. More about this in a moment. It is evident, nevertheless, that this particular list is not pertinent to the discussion of imitation that follows it. I believe the list is intended to remind us of the myth. In the myth, the first generation of people after Cronus releases his grip over the cosmos—that is, the first generation in the Age of Zeus—are “without expertise of any sort” (*Pol.* 274c). Unsurprisingly, this resulted in great difficulties for them. The Stranger claims that the arts were given to this generation from the gods, along with “the indispensable requirement for teaching and education” (*Pol.* 274c). Education is indispensable, we can add, because it is the sole means by which these arts can be passed on to the next generation. This passage should be recalled when the Stranger later describes the destruction of all the arts out of the hubris and suspicion of the people. To destroy the arts in this manner not only deprives humanity of the means for its survival, it is an offense to the gods who provided them. And it reduces us to the kind of domesticity and dependence that characterizes the unhappy Cronians—worse, in fact, since we have no one to depend on. Deprived of expertise, we find ourselves helpless and without any

means to survive in the Age of Zeus. Importantly, true experts provide something that closely resembles the kind of care provided to humans in the Age of Cronus. Experts provide to humanity something genuinely beneficial, something that cannot be provided by an assembly relying on decisions made by majority vote. Much like the divine care provided to the group in the Age of Cronus, experts can be trusted to know their art best. The qualitative difference between a city full of genuine expertise and a city where all matters are decided by the group is tantamount to the difference between a world in which care is divinely ensured and one wherein we are left to fend for ourselves. And the knowledge experts have should be understood as divinely inherited. If it can be imparted to the next generation, its offspring should be treated with reverence rather than suspicion. Thus, the situation that arises when non-expert assemblies assume command over the expertise and establish rules without knowledge closely parallels the situation that arises when Cronus releases control of the cosmic helm. It is a reversal of cosmic proportions, destroying the arts and, in turn, the benefits that come from them.

Structurally, however, the list serves as a transition for introducing a general maxim about written rules—that once the assembly establishes rules, it is wrong to disregard them (*Pol.* 300a). Lamentable though it may be, when faced with rules that are dictated by an assembly, rather than true experts, it is best to adopt the maxim defended here by the Stranger and fully adhere to the assembly's rules. The justification for the maxim is that, even if the written rules proceed from ignorance rather than knowledge,

the group is better off when each member adheres to them.<sup>139</sup> Acting contrary to the rules, whether for profit or in doing a favor, is wrong and an “evil (κακός) still greater” than the evil that is done to the expertise by the assembly (*Pol.* 300a). There is a still more important reason to adopt this maxim, however. The rules actually resemble the expertise they replace: they “have been established on the basis of much experiment, with some advisers or others having given advice on each subject in an attractive way, and having persuaded the majority to pass them” (*Pol.* 300b). In this way, the laws imitate true expertise (*Pol.* 300c) and “chase after the traces of the true constitution” (*Pol.* 301e).

This is a particularly interesting argument, and it is perhaps the first explicit argument for something like the rule of law.<sup>140</sup> Before the argument can succeed, however, two points must be made. First, the Stranger establishes that the art of statesmanship has been destroyed. Not only does he declare it so (at *Pol.* 297e), but the entire analogy on the destruction of medicine and navigation coupled with the allusions to Athens (as explained above) are meant to underline this point. Second, the Stranger insists that it will not return. This reason for this is in part because of the injunction

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<sup>139</sup> Meyer, “Plato on the Law,” 377 argues that this point in the *Statesman* explains Socrates’ refusal to disobey the law in the *Crito* and its purported inconsistency with Socrates’ promise to break it in the *Apology*. Meyer argues that it is one thing to break the law and be willing to accept the punishment (as Socrates is in the *Apology*), but it is a very different thing to flout the law by avoiding the punishment (as *Crito* urges). At *Pol.* 300b, the Stranger stresses that it is best to “not allow” anyone to break the law, and Meyer understands this merely to mean that a punishment should be applied for breaking the law. I do not see how this passage clearly establishes the dichotomy between flouting the law and breaking it. But I do think this passage is relevant. The Stranger bolsters his argument to follow the laws by noting that, in breaking them, the offender “would overturn all expert activity to a still greater degree than do the written rules” (*Pol.* 300b). By implication, the reason why one should refuse to break the law is that it exacerbates the harm done to the expertise to which the law pertains. However, the harm done to philosophy as a result the injunction against Socrates’ philosophizing would far outweigh the harm done in breaking it.

<sup>140</sup> See Stratilatis, “Counterpoint,” for a defense of this. Note, however, that reasons for what we might call the rule of law abound in Greek oratory: e.g. Lysias 16.12.

against inquiry into such matters (*Pol.* 299c), but also because no one is around to communicate this knowledge: “as things are, when—as we say—a king does not come to be in cities as a king-bee is born in a hive, one individual immediately superior in body and mind, it is necessary—so it seems—for people to come together and write things down” (*Pol.* 301de). This remark would seem to contradict the *Meno*, where Socrates is hopeful that someone will be divinely inspired with true opinions about statesmanship (*Meno* 99e-100a). And it would seem at odds with Socrates’ own claim to being a statesman at *Gorg.* 521c.<sup>141</sup> Nevertheless, the Stranger develops the argument for complying with the law on the assumption that the art is lost forever.

The argument is that, in the absence of statesmanship, the laws should be strictly observed because to do so is to correctly imitate the statesman. Laws that are passed at least aim at the genuine constitution. They are “imitations of the truth” (*Pol.* 300b) insofar as advisers have succeeded in persuading the assembly that they are beneficial. It follows that long-standing laws are better imitations, since they have withstood the test of time. As Harris explains, this was a commonly held belief in ancient Greece. Changes to the laws were regarded as a symptom of disorder.<sup>142</sup> However, the Stranger emphasizes the need to inscribe these laws, noting the use of a *kurbeis* at *Pol.* 298d and saying it is necessary to “write things down, chasing after traces of the truest constitutions” (*Pol.*

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<sup>141</sup> Not that there are any others. Socrates is, by his own admission, the only statesman in all of Athens.

<sup>142</sup> See Harris, *DRCLA*, 23. Sparta, for instance, often boasted of having 400-year-old laws. And laws often had entrenchment clauses to safeguard against changes, such as Solon’s ten-year clause. Meyer, “Plato on the Law,” 379, provides an amusing example of such an entrenchment clause: a Spartan lawgiver, having secured a promise from the people that they would follow his laws until his return, left the city and killed himself.

301e). This would seem at odds with *Laws* 793a where unwritten laws and ancestral customs are described as the bond between the laws. Further, the opinion that law should be written was unpopular. Gagarin argues that unwritten laws were preferred over written laws, with the former trumping the latter when they conflict.<sup>143</sup> With unwritten laws, the courts were protected against formalism and professionalism—that is, the laws were free from technical language and complexity, and professional lawyers were unnecessary.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, it was thought elitist to insist on written laws, since most litigants were illiterate. In any case, I see no reason to suggest that the Stranger is pushing an elitist agenda here (nor for thinking that Plato has some ulterior motive). Rather, as Taylor argues, this merely shows Plato's preference for the inflexibility of a written law.<sup>145</sup> In other words, the message the Stranger is emphasizing is that the law should be followed as strictly as possible, and that this is best facilitated through writing.

In any case, the maxim held by the Stranger to follow the laws, in spite of their divergence from the truth, is a maxim that appears commensurate with a defense for the rule of law, a value that Harris claims united the Greeks.<sup>146</sup> To what extent this may have been true in practice has been a matter of some controversy.<sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, it is fair to

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<sup>143</sup> In fact, according to Gagarin, *Writing Greek Law*, 204, there is very little conflict at all between written and unwritten law, and Aristotle, *Rhet.* I.15.1375a26-34, is misleading on this point.

<sup>144</sup> Gagarin, *Writing Greek Law*, 207.

<sup>145</sup> Taylor, *Sophist and Statesman*, 192.

<sup>146</sup> Harris, *DRLCA*, 4.

<sup>147</sup> See Ostwald, *FPSSL*, who explains that the transition from popular sovereignty to the sovereignty of law was a long and complicated one in Athens, and that it was most certainly not a unifying idea. Ostwald argues that legal reforms were not based on ideology at all, *pace* Harris. Rather, they were the product of



question the extent to which the *Statesman* is a text of political dissent. If the rule of law was a prevalent idea, and one that would have been more or less accepted by Plato's immediate audience, then perhaps the Stranger is endorsing the status quo.<sup>148</sup> As Saunders notes, it is natural to distinguish the *Republic* from Plato's later work by the radical approach of the former.<sup>149</sup> For Taylor, the political theory in the *Statesman* suggests that the mature Plato believes it is important to impose constitutional constraints on even the most philosophical rulers.<sup>150</sup> I agree that the *Statesman* endorses constitutional checks on power and the rule of law. However, in my opinion this endorsement should be qualified by the observation that the maxim for following the law is a second-best option. Although the laws imitate the truth, they are deviations from the true form. It must be remembered that these laws were responsible for the destruction of statesmanship in the first place. True sovereignty lies in the expertise of statesmanship, and not in the law. The theme of imitation that is repeatedly emphasized in the myth is again relevant here. The imitative self-directed motion of the cosmos is a complete reversal of its motion under the guidance of Cronus. Likewise, whereas the strict adherence to law is appropriate in the absence of statesmanship, life in a true constitution would look radically different.

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the particular historical situation. Cf. Ober, *Mass and Elite*, who defends the ideological account. In turn, Ober is heavily criticized by Hansen, *Athenian Democracy* for being too ideological.

<sup>148</sup> Perhaps, more specifically, the Stranger has in mind the Amnesty of 403 and the subsequent legislative reforms.

<sup>149</sup> Saunders, "Plato's Later," 464.

<sup>150</sup> Taylor, *Sophist and Statesman*, 206.

## 4.5 Summary

To understand how the politics of the *Statesman* fit with the rest of the dialogue, I argued that there are subtleties to the digression on constitutional forms and to the discussion at the end of the dialogue, and that these are importantly related to the method and the myth. The Stranger stresses repeatedly that an account of statesmanship is troublesome, and that some divisions are more difficult than others. I argued for treating divisions as a matter of forcing the soul to recognize a distinction, and that this is particularly difficult to do in the case of statesmanship, because statesman cannot be easily distinguished from imitators. In part, the difficulty arises because the art of statesmanship has been permanently destroyed, and in part because Young Socrates must come to understand that all existing constitutional forms are false imitations. Furthermore, I argued that the two stages to the method that were defended in Chapter 1 are consistent with how the statesman arranges the elements in a city. The statesman must both recognize the political divisions and manage them appropriately. This is best illustrated in the way the statesman weaves together the disparate virtues in the city through intermarriage and true opinion. In this sense, the statesman is both a divider and a weaver. Moreover, the statesman should be contrasted with the divine helmsman of the myth. The former manages the parts and in doing so properly constitutes the whole, whereas the latter directs the whole to bring harmony to the parts. However, there is something inherently unstable about the art of statesmanship, as suggested by analogy with the arts of navigation and medicine. Again, the myth should be recalled when the Stranger describes the destruction of these arts, since in both cases the importance of expertise is emphasized as something crucial for our survival. Finally, I discussed the

maxim for strict adherence to the law. In the absence of statesmen, laws are the best substitute. The defense for this amounts to an argument for the rule of law. However, it should more precisely be understood as emphasizing that the rule of law is a second-best departure from the only true form of government—the rule of statesmanship.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Conclusion

Plato's *Statesman* has yet to be fully appreciated. The many digressions and the emphasis on division have prompted scholars to treat it mainly as a treatise on method, with added bits that can be discussed independently. I have presented a case for reading the dialogue as a unified whole, by showing that the myth in the dialogue connects to the political theory and that both are informed by the method of division. These three facets come together because each concerns the proper management of the parts of a whole.

The argument for this claim can be found by combining the summaries in 2.3, 3.5, and 4.5, above, and I will not repeat it here. Instead, I will offer for consideration a few brief remarks on what has been suggested. In many ways, this thesis is an attempt to swim against a powerful current in ancient philosophy. There is a tendency, if not an urge, to think of the Platonic corpus as an aggregate of arguments that were rather inconveniently written in the form of dialogues. Many scholars prefer to extract from these dialogues various passages that can be analyzed independently. It is less common to find scholarship that draws on the form or the themes at work in Plato. And perhaps there is good reason to avoid doing so. After all, it is the business of philosophy to study ideas and arguments, and it would be a disservice to Plato not to subject his arguments to scrutiny. Yet, in doing so it is all too easy to lose sight of some of the more basic teachings in the text: the significance of character, the power of myth, the importance of discussion, and the dedication to the pursuit of knowledge. It is not my intention to attack any particular way of reading the Platonic dialogues. Rather, I only wish to suggest that it

is often helpful to appreciate the diversity of approaches that can be adopted in trying to understand them.

For the *Statesman* in particular, we might ask what Plato is suggesting more basically about politics in this dialogue, and what can be made of Socrates' claim to possessing statesmanship at *Gorg.* 521c. Does the fact that Young Socrates shares his name suggest that the statesman they describe is identical in name to a philosopher such as Socrates? At the end of the *Meno*, the discussion turns to the question of whether the statesman's knowledge can be communicated. Unfortunately, Socrates has offended Anytus and is obliged to leave. But he promises Meno that Athens itself would benefit should Meno be successful in mitigating the offence. Doubtless, Plato intends that Athenians will benefit from Socrates' philosophizing. But it is worth considering the political dimensions of Socrates' sustained engagements with the elite. And perhaps we can now say with at least some confidence that a genuine statesman is someone who can appropriately weave together stories or myths with speeches and dialectic for the betterment of the whole. We might add that the dialogue hints that there is a mythic element in dialectic, just as there is a political component to myths, and a dialectical aspect to politics. Further, the dialogue stresses the relative importance of parts in constituting the whole. Real politics concerns the intricate relations between individuals and between groups, and it is hubristic to think that political power should assume total control over the direction of the whole.

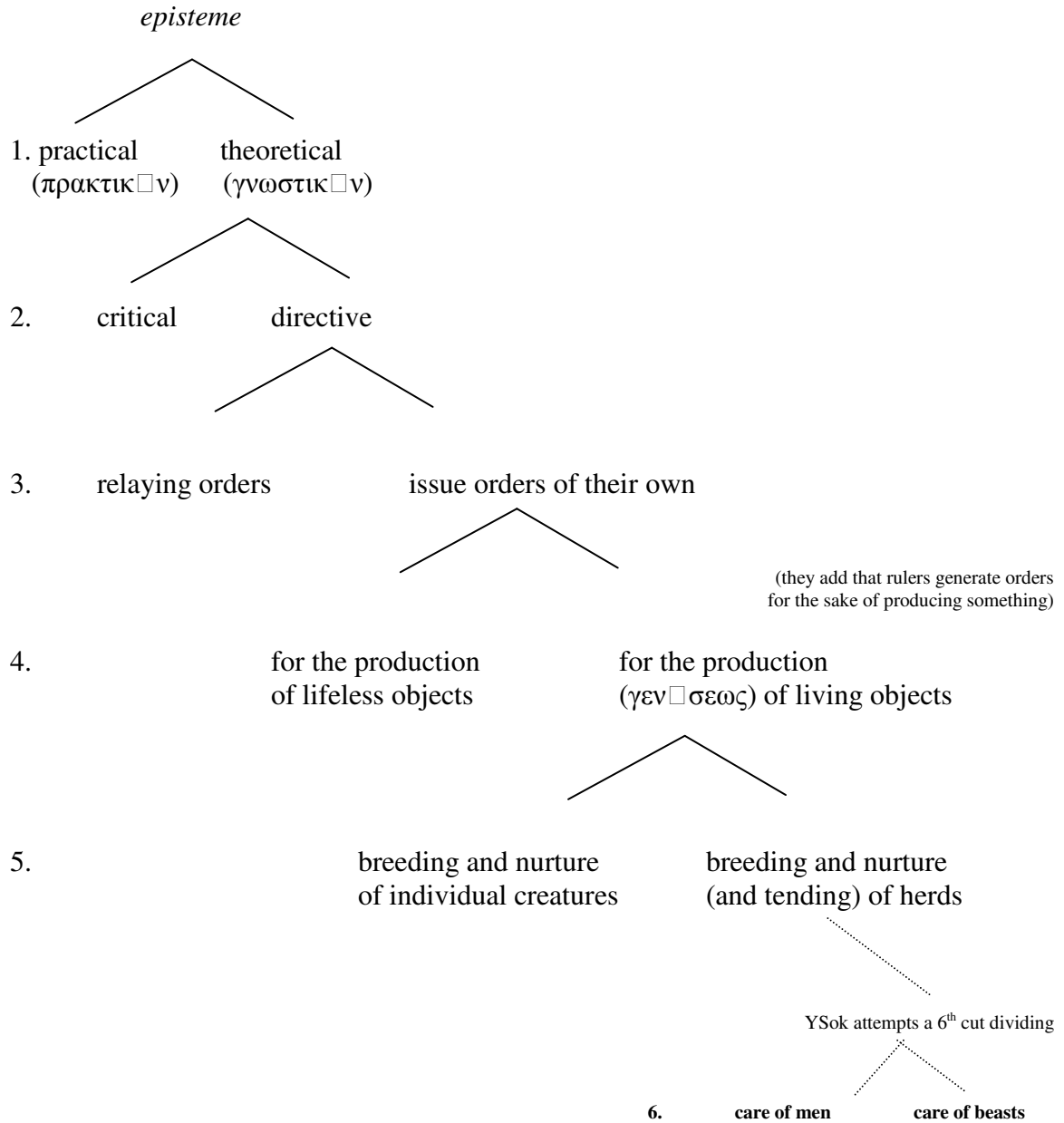
By acknowledging the unity of Plato's *Statesman*, we can better grasp each of its parts. Puzzlement with the method of division is somewhat alleviated by noting its connection to the craft of politics. And the political message is clearer when it is

understood in light of the myth. Yet, we might extend this further to ask how the *Statesman* connects to the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus*. How can these three dialogues be woven together? And what became of the promise to investigate philosophy? Recall that at the beginning of the *Theaetetus*, we find Euclides and Terpsion in Megara, and that what follows is the reading by a slave of the dialogue Euclides wrote to preserve the memory of a discussion from thirty years before. The *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, then, are episodes in a long story that spans an intricate discussion of knowledge and dialectic set in the days just before Socrates' trial. Treated together, these three dialogues might be thought to represent a general systematic treatment of philosophy. If so, then perhaps the *Philosopher* is revealed as the whole comprised of these dialogues. But whose philosophy is it? Given the setting in 399 and the ambition of Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, we might propose that it is his philosophy under investigation. Indeed, much is made of how much Theodorus *looks* like Socrates in the *Sophist* and of how Young Socrates shares his *name* in the *Statesman*. But if this is meant as a sustained treatment of Socrates' philosophy, then it is a different Socrates from the one we meet in the *Euthyphro*, for instance. The Socrates of the *Theaetetus* describes himself as a midwife for knowledge. Perhaps this is how the Megarians at Euclides' school thought of him. Or maybe Socrates' philosophy is not intended at all. Perhaps this is the philosophy of the Eleatics. There is some reason to think so, given the sudden appearance of the Stranger from Elea. If the *Parmenides* signals some revision to the thought of Plato, then perhaps we can read him as toying with Eleatic philosophy in these dialogues. Such an interpretation would have interesting consequences for the method of division. These remain questions for further research. However, such an investigation into the unity of

these three dialogues would be done in the same spirit as my investigation here into the unity of the *Statesman*.

## Appendix A

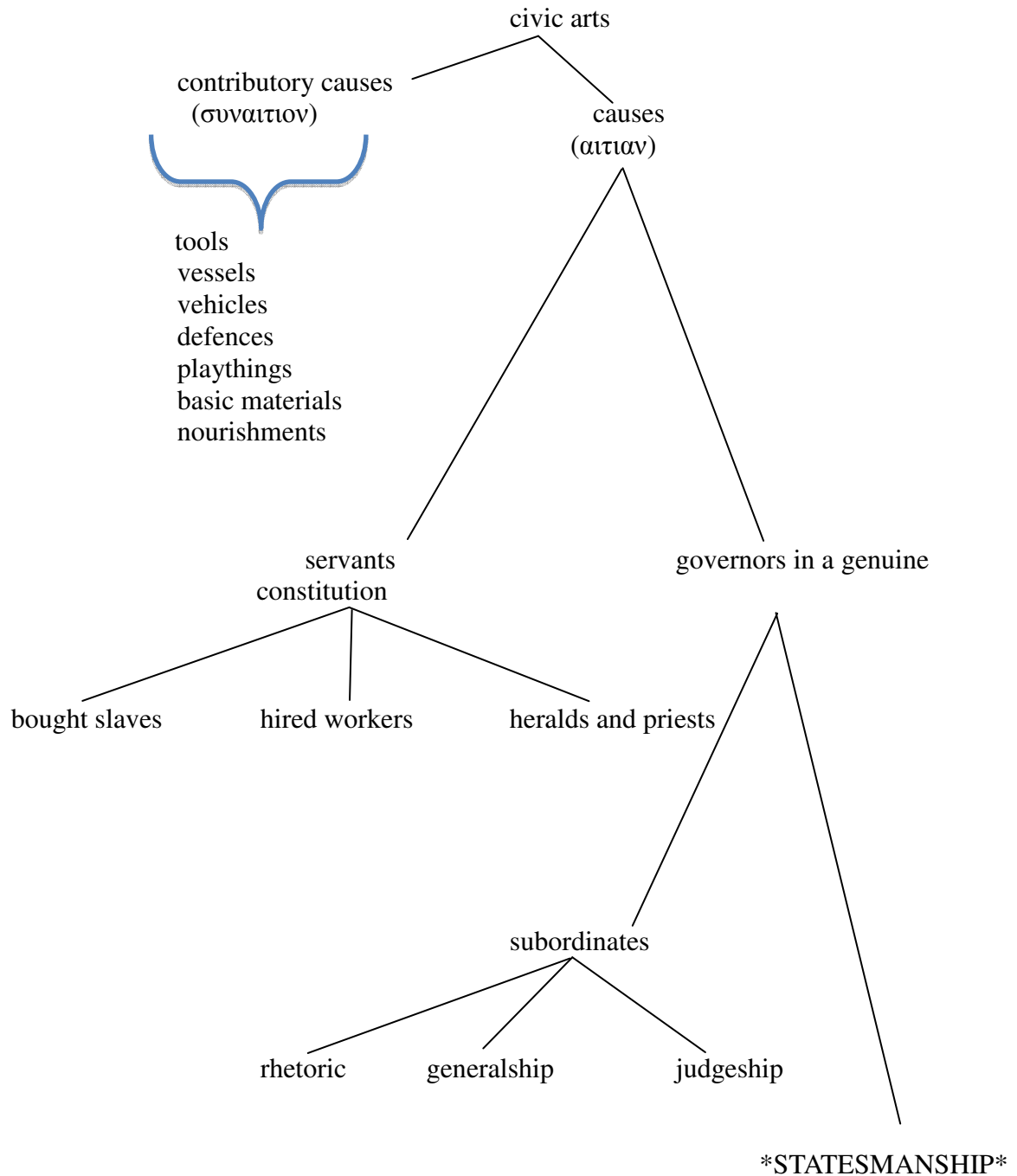
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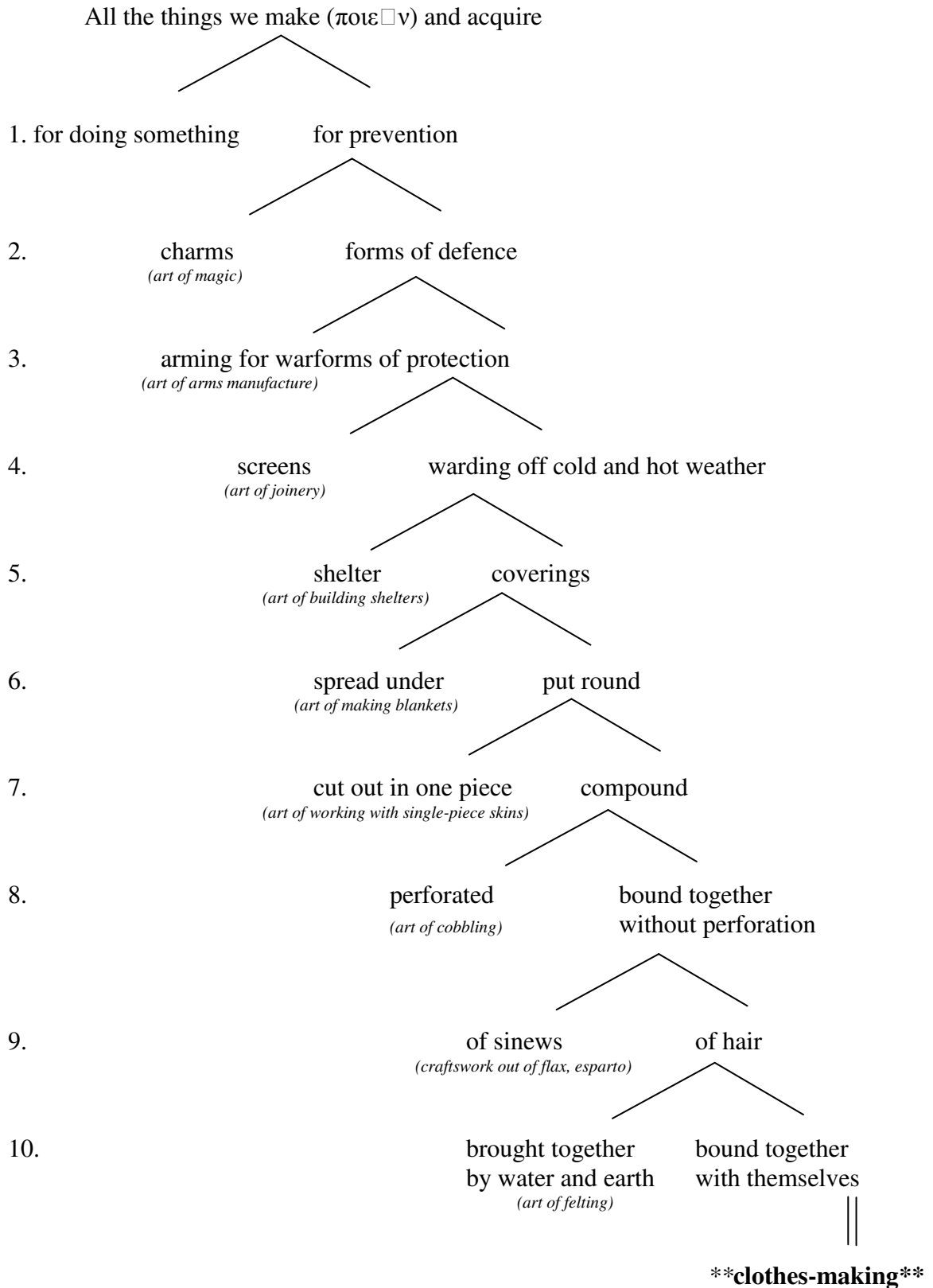




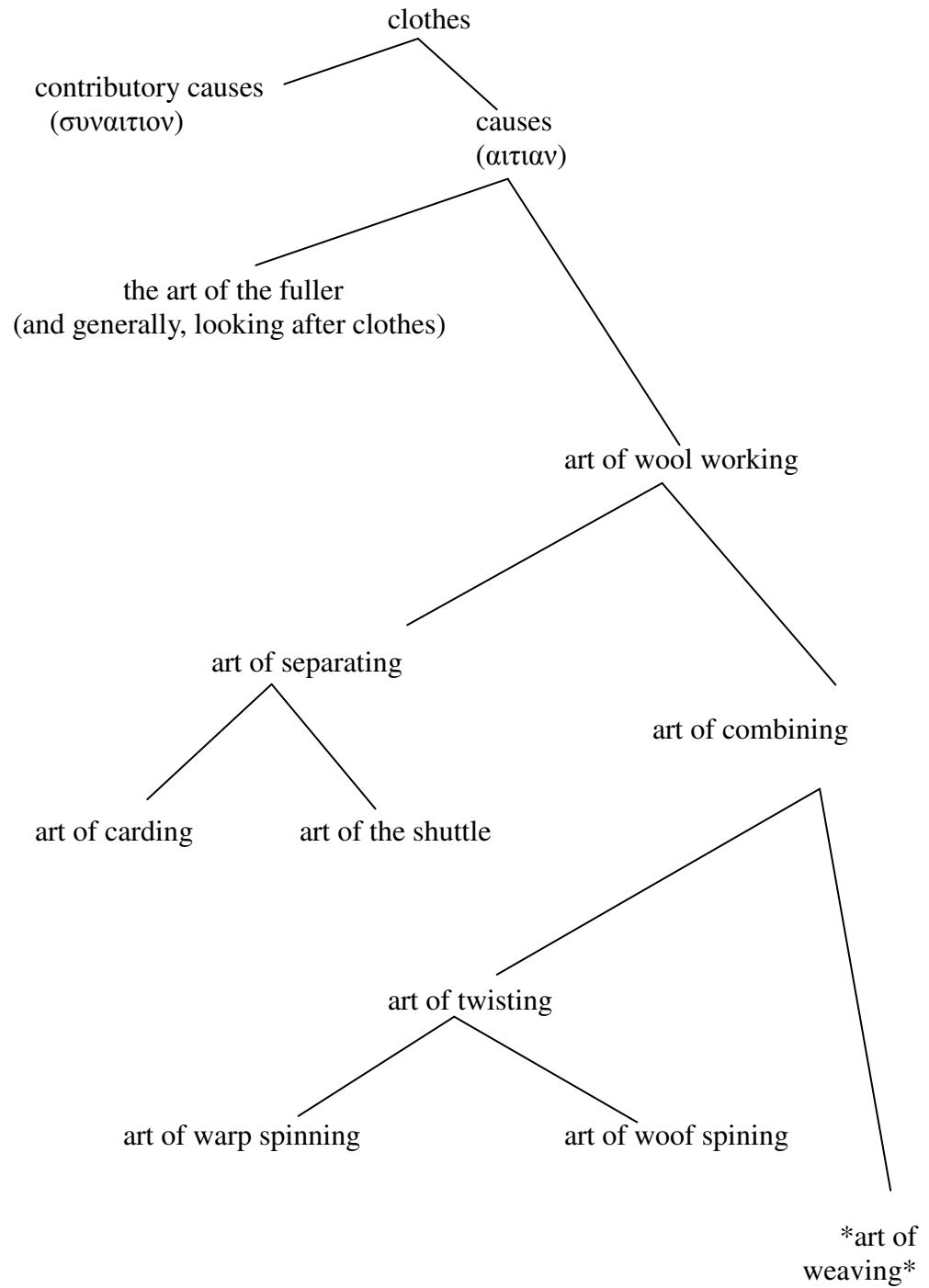
## Second stage in the account of statesmanship



## First stage of the account of weaving



## Second stage of the account of weaving



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## Curriculum Vitae

**NAME:** Ryan Middleton

### **UNIVERSITIES (Dates and Degrees):**

2008 M.A. Queen's University

2007 B.A. (Hons.) Brandon University

### **DISTINCTIONS, HONOURS, AND SCHOLARSHIPS:**

- ✧ Award of Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, University of Western Ontario (2012-13).
- ✧ OGS: Ontario Graduate Scholarship (2009).
- ✧ A.R.C. Duncan Award for Excellence in Tutoring, Queen's University (2008).
- ✧ SSHRC: Canada Graduate Scholarship (2008).
- ✧ Tri-Council Recipient Recognition Award, Queen's University (2008).
- ✧ Marion E. Bowen Scholarship in English Literature, Brandon University (2007).
- ✧ Hargreaves-Mawdsley Scholarship Third-year Philosophy, Brandon University (2006)

### **PREVIOUS UNIVERSITY EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

#### Queen's University

- ✧ Teaching Assistant. Moral Issues. Supervisor: Dr. Patrick Moran. PHIL 157. Winter, 2008.
- ✧ Teaching Assistant. Existentialism. Supervisor: Dr. Adèle Mercier. PHIL 256. Fall, 2007.

#### University of Winnipeg

- ✧ Marking Assistant. Environmental Ethics. Dr. Sandra Tomsons. PHIL 2233. Winter, 2006.

#### Brandon University

- ✧ Marking Assistant. Environmental Ethics. Dr. Steven Robinson. 70:266. Winter, 2007.
- ✧ Marking Assistant. Intro. to Canadian Literature. Dr. Reinhold Kramer. 30:162. Fall 2005.

- ⤴ Marking Assistant. Intro. to Canadian Literature. Dr. Reinhold Kramer. 30:162. Winter 2005.

**DATE AND TYPE OF APPOINTMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO (Continuous Service To Present):**

- ⤴ Teaching Assistant. Business Ethics. Supervisor: Dr. Dean Proessel. PHIL 2074F. Fall, 2008.
- ⤴ Teaching Assistant. Big Ideas. Supervisor: Dr. Steve Bland. PHIL 1130G. Winter, 2009.
- ⤴ Teaching Assistant. Introduction to Philosophy. Supervisor: Dr. John Thorp. PHIL 1020. Fall/Winter, 2010/11.

**COURSES TAUGHT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO**

- ⤴ Evil. PHIL 2065G. Winter, 2011
- ⤴ Early Modern Philosophy. PHIL 2202F. Summer, 2012.
- ⤴ Philosophy of Education. PHIL 2053 (King's College). Fall/Winter, 2012/13.
- ⤴ Terrorism. PHIL 2083G. Winter, 2013.
- ⤴ Evil. PHIL 2065F. Fall, 2013.
- ⤴ Philosophy of Education. PHIL 2053 (King's College). Fall/Winter, 2013/14.
- ⤴ Plato. PHIL 3003G (Huron College). Winter, 2014.

**PAPERS READ (Title, Occasion, Date):**

Comment on J. Clerk Shaw's "Drama and Dialectic in Plato's *Protagoras*" presented at 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Arizona Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy. Tucson, AZ. 22 February 2013.

"Above the Laws: Rule of Law as the Imitation of Statesmanship in Plato's Later Dialogues" presented at Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy. New York, NY. 19 October 2012.

"In Search of a Future-Oriented Ethics: Benatar, Nietzsche, and Jonas on the Duty to Posterity," presented at Canadian Society for the Study of Practical Ethics. Waterloo, Ontario. 28 May 2012.

"The Linkage Problem in Aristotle's Theory of Memory," presented at Congress 2009 (Canadian Philosophical Association). Ottawa, Ontario. 25 May 2009.

"The Problem of Middle-level Ends: Restoring Eudaimonism to a Monistic Reading of the *Nicomachean Ethics*," presented at University of Western Ontario History of Philosophy Conference. London, Ontario. 20 March 2008.